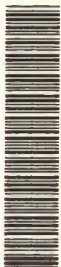


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# Roxy's Good Angel

and other

New England Tales

Eva Beede Odell



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(Am. Fiction)

(1908)

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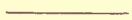
Roxy's Good Angel

and

Other New England Tales

By

Eva Beede Odell Odell



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1908

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By EVA BEEDE ODELL

TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
MY MOTHER  
CAROLINE FRANCES BEEDE  
THIS VOLUME  
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED





## CONTENTS

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Roxy's Good Angel . . . . .	7
Silas Mason's Will . . . . .	29
Caught in a Cyclone . . . . .	45
Their Other Mother . . . . .	61
Nathan's Wife . . . . .	81
Miss Harden's Christmas Party . . . . .	103



## I.

### ROXY'S GOOD ANGEL.

“If you’ve got tew a spot where you c’n leave off, mebbe you’d best come out an’ fry the nut cakes fer me, a-standin’ over the hot fat fetches out my ’umor so. The stuff that root an’ yarb doctor fixed up fer me ’s a-helpin’ of me, but he said I’d hev ter be dretful keerful ’bout gittin’ my blood het,” said Mrs. Kent, as she put her head into the “west room,” where her daughter, Roxana, was carefully placing the braided mats on the cleanly swept rag carpet. “That hooked-in rug’s a beauty! I’m glad you put it before the table where ’t won’t git trod on much,” continued Mrs. Kent, as she looked admiringly at a rug upon which blossomed a bouquet of flowers which it would have puzzled a botanist to classify. “Did David notice your new rug last Sunday night, Roxy?”

“Yes, he said ’t I beat natur’ on posies,” was the reply.

It was a balmy Saturday morning in the last of May. The scent of the lilacs and the songs

of the robins floated in through the open windows, the old maples in front of the house gently waved their tender leaves over the low roof and dandelions spangled with gold the new green grass in the dooryard.

“When I can read my title clear,”

Roxy's sweet voice sang, as she briskly swept off the door-rock, on either side of which the great red peonies were in bloom; then she went in to fry the doughnuts.

“Guess I'll bake a couple o' dried apple pies, you pa loves 'em so,” remarked Mrs. Kent, as she came out of the buttery with her palms covered with great rings of dough, which she dropped into the hot, sputtering fat and watched them as they struggled to the surface. “Soon's you git through here, Roxy,” she continued, “hadn't you better break off some o' the laylocks and pinies and make a bokay to set on the mantel piece? Them pine boughs doos look nice in the fireplace. Then, bime-bye, you might run down in the garden an' see 'f there hain't some rubub big enough t' cut, so's't I c'd stew a leetle fer sass. Mis' B'ynton says she's dretful fond on't, but they hain't got no pie-plant 'cause he don't like it. I shouldn't 'a' asked Mis' B'ynton over Saturday, when I had so much to do;

only the skulemarm goes home Friday nights, an' I wa'n't under no obligations to ask her."

Roxana Kent was the only child of Seth and Hannah Kent. Seth was born in this little red house, and here he had always lived, on the "Neck Road," as it was called, for that part of the town stretched out into the great lake. Jonathan Kent, the father of Seth, had built the house, and, as Richard, the omer son, had gone to seek his fortune in the West several years ago, Seth had been the one to live at home and take care of the old folks and at their death he had inherited the homestead.

On the adjoining farm lived Stephen Allen, who was the most forehanded of all the farmers on the Neck Road. His house was painted white, except the back side, which was a durable red, as was the custom. He rode in a chaise, and his wife had a haircloth sofa in the fore-room and a black silk gown hanging in the spare room clothes-press.

The Allens had only one child living, but three little white marble stones were noticeable among the blue slate ones in the burying-ground near the schoolhouse, and here in a row were the three little Allens, who had died of the scarlet fever.

Mrs. Allen had great ambitions for her only

son, David. He was sent out to the village to the tuition school when he had "got beyend the deestriect skule" on the Neck, but he came home Friday nights to remain until Monday morning, and always went over to spend his Sunday evenings with Roxy. They had cared for each other since they were children, David bringing big red apples to school for Roxy to eat at recess, and Roxy always sliding on David's sled. In summer he took her in his boat to gather pond-lilies and in winter they skated together. He was always "her company" at the Fourth of July picnics and at the husking-bees; he saw her home from singing-school and from prayer-meeting, and he nearly died of jealousy the week when her cousin Will was on from the West.

It was now more than three years that David had been "payin' attention" to Roxy, going to "set up with her reg'lar" every Sunday night. Still, there seemed to be no prospect of a wedding in the neighborhood. David was now almost twenty-three and Roxy a few months younger. The old women said, "David's dretful slow, jes' like his uncle Reuben, fer he courted Maria Jane Smith goin' on ten year; then she got tired o' waitin' an' up an' married Lem Bartlett, an' then Reuben he spunked up an' took Luke Foster's widder."

Meanwhile Roxy was making rugs and patchwork quilts, and getting her things ready. She also braided hats, and with the money thus earned bought clothes, besides laying away, carefully tied up in a white cotton stocking, a sum sufficient to purchase enough green silk for a wedding gown. Still the time went on, and David didn't say the word.

The "skulemarm," a pretty little blonde from the village, boarded at Caleb Boynton's and only the night before last she had been invited to supper at the Allens. Although she had gone home alone, before dark (Roxy knew because her black eyes had been watching from the bedroom window), the Kents feared that Mrs. Allen was aspiring for a village girl for her son, so Mrs. Kent had invited Mrs. Boynton over for the purpose of finding out what she could about the "skulemarm."

Mrs. Boynton appeared promptly at two o'clock, in a clean, starched gingham, knitting-work in hand. She was "footin' down a pair o' stockin's fer Calup," she remarked. Mrs. Kent, who had put on a new purple print, got out her knitting, too, and tongues and needles flew fast. Soon Roxy came in, radiant in a pink calico and a white apron. She was knitting edging. Mrs. Boynton admired the pattern and told

her about some "hansum" lace that the "skulemarm was a-knittin' of, fer piller cases," and went on to describe the log-cabin and the Job's trouble quilts that she was "a-piecin' up," adding, "Law sakes, she's up soon's light a-workin' on 'em!"

"What's she so driv fer? Goin' ter git married?" asked Mrs. Kent.

"Yes, 'fore a great while, I guess, but she told me in confidence, so don't say nothin' 'bout it. I wouldn't hev it come from me fer the world, but she's a-keepin' skule ter git money ter buy her a silk gownd. She's a-goin' ter hev sky blue, an' I tell her she'll look jest as pretty as a pictur' in it, she's so light-complected. The feller she's a-goin' to marry's a minister, so she says she dunno's she'll ever git another silk gownd. She met with him over t' the 'cademy t' the Bridge, where she went ter git her edecashun. He hain't got quite through his skulin' but they hain't a-goin' ter wait. There, I promised not ter tell, so don't you breathe a word on't ter no livin' soul."

Roxy and her mother willingly pledged themselves to keep the secret, for a great burden had been lifted from their hearts. Evidently "the skulemarm wasn't a-settin' of her cap" for David.



Mrs. Kent took out some of her warm brown bread and beans for supper, leaving the rest in the brick oven for the Sunday morning breakfast. "I do declare," said Mrs. Boynton, passing up her plate for more, "I believe them beans is the best I ever eat. I wish *he* (meaning her husband) had some. He told me to say to you that he was much obleeged fer your invite to supper, but he was so driv with his plantin' that he couldn't stop ter shift his clo'es and come. I b'iled a big mess o' dandelion greens fer dinner so's ter hev some left over, so I guess he'll make out a supper, for he loves cold greens awful well."

Mrs. Kent loaded Mrs. Boynton's plate with the rhubarb sauce, remarking, "They say they have sass dishes out ter the village. I s'pose you git all the styles from the skulemarm, don't ye?"

"Anyhow," responded Mrs. Boynton, "I don't believe there's anybody t' the village can hold a candle ter you on nut cakes. I must get your resate."

Very soon after supper, Seth, who was a quiet man and had taken but little part in the conversation, picked up his milking pails and started for the cow-yard, while Roxy cleared the table and washed the dishes. The old clock in the kitchen struck seven and Mrs. Boynton

rolled up her knitting-work, remarking, "I guess I'd best be goin' 'long. Calup 'll be a-lookin' fer me."

"I'll go a piece with ye," said Mrs. Kent, putting on her cape-bonnet.

They walked together to the turn of the road and there they parted, Mrs. Boynton assuring Mrs. Kent that "her vittles did taste so good," and Mrs. Kent in response saying, "Now dew be neighborly an' run over often, fer ye hain't no idee how much good yer visit 's done me."

## II.

The lilacs had faded and the great peonies had shed their crimson petals. The yellow dandelions had been transformed into balls of dainty lacework that had dropped apart and in innumerable fairy shafts had sped away on the wings of the wind. The tender green of spring had deepened into the thick shade of summer. Haying-time had come, when the tall timothy, the graceful red-top and the fragrant clover were stowed away in the great barns. The crops had ripened and been harvested all along the Neck Road. The women-folks had strung all the apples that were worth stringing, and those that

were good for nothing else had been made into cider.

It was now December, the fall work was done and the men-folks were "a-choppin'" in the woods, in order that they might build up the family wood-pile, or draw "a few cords ter the village, soon 's it come good sleddin'." Meanwhile the women were devoting all their spare time to knitting "sale foot'n's."

One mild day as the Boyntons were partaking of a good old-fashioned "bile dinner," and Caleb was just helping himself to some more of the cabbage, and the turnips, and the beets, remarking, "I declar', Nancy, I'll bet there hain't a woman on t' the road 't can come up ter you fer b'ilin' garden sass," Mrs. Boynton suddenly changed the subject by asking, "Be you a-goin' ter be off ter th' wood-lot all the arternune?" Caleb nodding assent, she continued, "'Cause 'f you be, I'm a-goin' over t' the Kentses. I hain't be'n over there 'n a dog's age an' I'd oughter go over 'n tell 'em 'bout the weddin'. Pore Roxy, I sh'd think she'd be clean discouraged, an' 'f David Allen's ever a-goin' ter marry her, why under the canopy don't he do it? I never see nobody so slow 'bout their courtin' in my born days."

As soon as she got the dishes "done up," the

stove "wiped down," and the kitchen "swept out," Mrs. Boynton put on a green and black-checked, home-made, woolen gown (she had spun and woven it herself, and "kep' it fer hansum" six years but was now taking it for second-best), a heavy red and green changeable shawl and a big, brown silk, pumpkin hood. Then, dropping her knitting-work into her capacious pocket, she set out for the Kents'.

It was not the custom for neighbors to knock at each other's doors, so Mrs. Boynton walked right into the kitchen, where sat Mrs. Kent and Roxy. "How d' do? I'm so snow-blind I can't hardly tell which from t' other," said she. "I'm wropped up 's if I 's goin' ter ride ter th' Bridge." Then, rolling up her heavy mittens and putting her socks behind the stove, while Roxy hung up her shawl and hood and Mrs. Kent brought forward a big rocking-chair, she took out her work and settled herself. "What be you a-drivin' at now, knittin', I s'pose, same 's I be?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Kent, "me an' Roxy's stented ourselves to git a derzern pair o' foot'n's done 'g'inst father goes out ter the village ag'in, but we're dretful glad you've come over ter set a spell. Comfortable weather fer the time o' year, hain't it?"

“Yes, but ’t was dretful teedyus last week. I sh’d a be’n over sooner ’f it hadn’t be’n so cold. I wanted to tell ye ’bout our goin’ out ter the village to eat Thanksgivin’ dinner,” said Mrs. Boynton, as they all drew up around the fire.

“For the land’s sake, Mis’ B’ynton, I didn’t know ’s none o’ your folks lived out ter the village, nor his’n nuther!”

“Wall, they don’t,” continued the speaker, “but me and Calup had a invite out ter the weddin’.”

“The weddin’!” exclaimed both listeners in a breath.

“Yes,” explained Mrs. Boynton. “Don’t you rec’lect Almiry Folsom, she that boarded ’long o’ me an’ kep’ our skule last summer?”

“Land, yes, father was a-tellin’ on’t when he come home from the store t’other night. He heerd she was married in the meetin’-house on Thanksgivin’ day. An’ you’s there an’ see it all. How you talk! Dew tell us all about it!” eagerly exclaimed Mrs. Kent, while Roxy stopped knitting to listen.

“Wall, in the fust place,” began Mrs. Boynton, “Almiry an’ her feller, they come in kind o’ latish an’ set down nigh the door. I guess folks had got wind on’t round, what was a-goin’

on, leastways they suspicioned it, fer the meetin'-house was pretty well filled up. Elder Price, he preached a powerful sermon, jest an hour an' twenty-five minutes long 't was, fer Mr. Taylor told me he took out his time-piece an' looked. Like enough he was a leetle narvous an' the time seemed long. Then, when the elder had got through, 'stid o' pronouncin' the bendiction 's usual, says he, 'The congregation 's requested to tarry a spell.' Then he called fer Richard Taylor an' Almiry Folsom to come forrard to the altar, so they stood up there an' was married right in the meetin'-house, afore the hull on us."

"What was she married in?" put in Roxy.

"Her blue silk gownd o' course, an' a blue silk bunnit with a white feather an' white strings an' she wore white kid gloves. Dick, as she calls him, he 's considerable dark-complected, but Almiry, you know, she's jest pink an' white, an' everybody sed they was the *prettiest couple* that they ever set eyes on."

"Then you's ter the dinner! Who else 'd they have?" asked Mrs. Kent.

"Bein' 's there hain't none o' his folks livin', 'cept his Aunt Harriet, an' she's a missionary off in Chiny, the Folsomses thought they wouldn't send down below fer none o' their kin to come up, but Almiry, she'd set her heart on havin' me

an' Calup, so they jest asked us an' the minister's folks. They fetched all three o' the young uns, o' course, they hadn't nobody t' leave 'em with, an' they acted like all possessed. They say she hain't no kind of a housekeeper, that she sets right down in the mornin' a-writin' poetry 'fore ever she's combed her head, an' the young uns goes a-traipsin' over her. She writ a piece on 'The Bride' an' gin it to Almiry to remember her by."

"Dear me suz!" exclaimed Mrs. Kent. "Now dew tell us what ye hed ter eat."

"Why, we hed chicken pie, an b'iled onions, an' cranberry sass—"

"In sass dishes?" interrupted Mrs. Kent.

"Law, yes," was the answer, "'t was took out in leetle glass dishes an' sot round to each plate. Then there was apple pie an' punkin pie an' plum puddin'."

"Most proberble the Folsomses is middlin' well off," said Mrs. Kent.

"I don't cal'late they be remarkerble forehanded. He's a cooper by trade, but he's hauled up with the rheumatiz a good deal, so, says I ter Calup, says I, 'We hain't a-goin' out there empty-handed,' so we put in ter the wagon one o' them great punkins o' ourn, and a leetle crock o' my b'iled cider apple-sass, an' a couple

string o' sassage. Then I'd knit Almiry a han-sum pair o' white cotton stockin's, the front on 'em was all in shells, an' she was 'mazin' tickled with 'em. She said sh'd never want ter wear 'em out, but keep 'em t' look on 's long's she lived."

There was a moment's lull in the conversation, then Mrs. Boynton, changing the subject, continued, "S'pose you know'd 't Elder Zebulon Whittlesey, from over t'other side o' Long Pond, was a-comin' here ter hold pertractid meetin', didn't ye?"

"No," was the reply, "we hadn't heerd on 't. When do they begin, an' where's the elder a-goin' ter put up?"

"They'll make it their headquarters over ter Joel Weekses, the elder's fust wife was a cousin o' Mis' Weekses, you rec'lect. He's a-goin' ter fetch his fam'ly, an' I s'pose folks 'll be expected t' invite 'em round ter spend the day. Joel was over yisterday an' he said the meetin's would begin next Sunday night 't early candle light, an' he wanted that we sh'd git th' word round. Them that's heerd her says Mis' Whittlesy's dretful giftid an' makes a butyful exertashun. There! the sun's a-goin' down behind Blueb'ry Hill. I never did see how short the days be. I must be goin' 'long. Dew come over



now, won't ye, both on ye. 'Pears to me you're lookin' kind o' peaked, hain't ye, Roxy?"

But Roxy blushingly denied the charge, as she helped Mrs. Boynton on with her hood and shawl and soon the good woman was trudging toward home in the twilight, saying to herself that she didn't know when she'd enjoyed "an arter-nune" so much as she had that one.

### III.

The next Sunday night was clear and frosty; the stars twinkled in the steely blue sky, and the snow sparkled in the moonbeams. People were wending their way toward the little old meeting-house on the hilltop, stopping now and then at the sound of bells, and stepping aside for the high-backed sleighs to glide past.

David had called, as usual, for Roxy and together they climbed the hill, but were obliged to separate on reaching the meeting-house, Roxy going in at the door on the right, as that was the women's side, and David entering at the men's door on the left. This unpretending structure was unpainted outside and inside, the benches had straight backs and hard, uncushioned seats. At the farther end of the room was the great desk, at the left of which was the

amen corner, where Uncle 'Liphe Bennett always sat, with his chin resting on his hands, which were clasped over the top of his cane, inspiring the preacher with his frequent responses.

The house was filled, even to the back seats by the two great stoves, where the small boys were accustomed to sit, and, during the sermons, never less than an hour in length, exercise their skill in wood-carving.

Presently Elder Zebulon Whittlesey, or Elder Zeb, as he was familiarly called, entered, hastily threw off his buffalo coat and took his place in the desk, on either side of which sputtered a tall candle in a brass candlestick. Other candles were placed in the windows, their flickering light shining on the small seven-by-nine panes and casting weird shadows upon the congregation. These candles were not honored with candlesticks. After they were lighted they were held with the flame downward until little pools of melted tallow had formed on the window sills and in these the candles stood.

The minister lined the hymn and the people sung as he read, two lines at a time.

“Now in the heat of youthful blood,  
Remember you Creator, God.”

The sermon was on the terrors of the approach-

ing judgment day. "The time draweth nigh," said the preacher. "When Gabriel sounds his trumpet, what will you do, my friends—ah? If you've got any variences, now's the time to settle 'em—ah. Brother Abner an' Brother Noah, be you a-goin' to let a little strip o' old swamp land—ah—keep you out o' the Kingdom of Heaven—ah?"

As he warmed up with his subject, he took off his coat and finally his vest. He pounded the big Bible until the old desk shook; then he walked up and down the platform, wiping his face with a big silk bandana. Aunt Hitty Green, speaking of it afterwards, said, "He sweat like a butcher," and Timothy Skinner, who was "deef 's an adder," and always sat in the "amen corner" with his hand curved behind his left ear, said, "Elder Zeb, he jes' put in the dead licks that night 'f ever a man did!"

The old meeting-house rang with the voice of his warning; then it was so still that one could have heard the dropping of a pin and the more timid ones trembled, as if expecting to hear the blast of doom rend the cold, clear sky.

The sermon was nearly two hours long, and was followed by a prayer-meeting, when the invitation was given and many crowded forward to the "mourner's bench," so it was about half

past ten o'clock when the people left the old meeting-house.

David walked along silently by Roxy's side, and, as his custom was, went in to "set a spell" and eat some apples. He raked open the coals in the fore-room fireplace and put on some wood, while she went down cellar to fill the apple dish. Then they sat down before the fire and talked over the meeting. Roxy wondered if it were really true that the world was coming to an end very soon, but David was somewhat skeptical. The Allens were not "perfessors," but the Kents were of the "Millerite" faith and often spoke of the last days and the end of the world, but seemed in no haste for the coming of that event, at least not until they had seen Roxy "married an' settled down."

David had just put another stick on the andirons and sat with the tongs in his hands punching the fire. Close beside him was Roxy looking earnestly into the glowing coals and thinking what would become of all her beautiful quilts and rugs if the world really should come to an end, when suddenly through the midnight sounded the shrill blast of a trumpet. "That awful day has surely come" ran through Roxy's head, as she put out her hands and fell almost fainting with fright into David's arms. Again

and again the trumpet sounded, waking father and mother Kent, and finally the whole neighborhood. At first the good people peeped timidly from their windows, then cautiously stole out of their houses to find the old world just as they had left it when they went to the land of dreams, except that there was a white-robed figure on the top of the meeting-house hill blowing a trumpet.

At length some of the braver ones ventured to approach the angel and found that it was Aunt Ketury Follansbee. "Ketury was once the handsomest gal in the hull neighborhood," so the older people said, "but she was dispinted an' had be'n kind o' daft ever sense." She had been out to the meeting and had come home so wrought up that she had conceived the idea of impersonating the angel Gabriel and calling her neighbors to render up their final accounts; so, draping herself in a sheet and taking an old dinner horn she had gone up to the meeting-house to call together the living and the dead.

Ketury was considered harmless and as the Follansbees were "middlin' well to do," she had two rooms where she kept house by herself in the old home, while her sister, Charity, "who had married with Timothy Skinner," lived in the other part. After the meeting was out Charity had gone over to watch with Granny Per-

kins, who had had "a shock o' numb palsy" the day before "an' wa'n't 'spected to live the night out," and Timothy, being "deef's a post," had not heard Ketury go out. When the poor, dazed creature saw herself surrounded by the company which she had called together, she realized that she had made a mistake, and quietly submitted to be led back home.

David and Roxy never remembered just how it happened, but in that awful moment, when they thought that time was no more, they realized how much they were to each other, and after the terrible fright was over, and the cause was found to be, not Gabriel's trumpet, but the old Follansbee dinner horn, somehow David mustered up courage to ask Roxy to marry him.

The next day as mother and daughter discussed the all-important topic, Mrs. Kent said emphatically, "Now, Roxy, I sh'd advise you t' strike whilst the iron's hot. Your clo'es is plenty good 'nough, an' 'f I was in your place I shouldn't never wait to git that 'ere green silk gownd made up." And Roxy decided that it was best not to wait. So on Thursday evening, just as Elder Price was buttoning up his great coat and preparing to go over to Deac'n Bascom's to lead the prayer-meeting, he was startled by a loud and sudden rap on the knocker.

and going to the "fore-door" found there a couple wishing to be married. Mrs. Price was hastily called from the bedroom (where she was singing little Tommy to sleep) into the study, and there witnessed the ceremony that made David Allen and Roxana Kent husband and wife.

When the door had closed on the newly-married pair the elder dropped a crisp two-dollar bill into his wife's lap, saying, "Now, Lucindy, help me into my surtout as quick as ever you can, for I'm belated about the meeting. I came within one of missing that job, didn't I?"

"Some good angel must have helped them along," responded his wife, smoothing out the new bank note. "They'd had to gone over to the Orthodox minister's. His meeting hain't so early as ours, and I don't believe his wife needs the money half as much as I do. Now I can have my winter bonnet trimmed over."

Some of the sisters had said to each other, confidentially, that "they was afraid that Mis' Price was a leetle grain too worldly for a parson's wife." And Lucinda Price, standing at the looking-glass and pulling out her bonnet strings often thought how becoming they were, but never knew to whom she was indebted for her bright ribbons.

Roxy, however, recognized her good angel and firmly believed that David would never have come to the point of "speaking out" but for Aunt Ketury's help, and she was duly grateful, so the poor soul always had in her a kind and faithful friend. David often said that he never could see what made Roxy "set so much by ole Ketury Follansbee," and Mrs. Kent said, "I never see the beat on 't, she didn't afore she was married."

But Roxy kept her own counsel.



## I.

### SILAS MASON'S WILL.

It was one of those rare days that come in the last of September. There had been a few cool, frosty nights, then this beautiful warm day, when the golden haze hung over the landscape and softened the sharp outlines of the mountains. Not a cloud was mirrored upon the smooth, blue bosom of the lake with its double border of bright crimson, golden yellow and deep green, the hillside and its reflection. Along the roadside blossomed the late goldenrod and the purple asters. The silky milkweed seeds floated lazily away from the bursting pods, and the air was full of the chirp of crickets and the fragrance of wild grapes.

Hannah Wilson, going over to spend the afternoon with Mrs. Ruben Mason, noticed none of the beauties of nature around her, and as she walked along only thought, "It's gettin' dretful warm, an' we'd ought to hev some rain to lay the dust." She was quite a corpulent woman and a little stiff, as she had been doing a large washing that morning.

After prayer-meeting the night before, this visit had been planned. "If it's a fair day," said Hannah, "Isaac's a-goin' up to th' Falls with a load o' boarders."

"And our men-folks is a-goin' to be a-fencin' over to the Leavitt pastur'," said Mrs. Mason. "Now dew come airly!" And soon after one o'clock Hannah was on her way for an old-fashioned visit. She wore a clean starched calico dress, a new checked gingham apron and a Shaker, and on her arm hung a small black shawl with a bright border, "'g'inst it might come up a little cool towards night."

Although the beauties of the landscape had failed to awaken any emotion in Hannah Wilson, nothing along the way escaped her notice. "Mis' Hanson had kivered up her daleyees so 's 't the frost hadn't spilt 'em. Steve Baker's gate was a-hangin' on one hinge, prob'ly Eme-line an' her beau were a-leanin' on to it last night. Nancy Sykes had got her curtains rolled up in the fore-room, must be she'd got comp'ny. Dave Henry Cook was a-settin' in a rockin'-cheer out under that big maple o' his'n, readin', shif'-less critter. He'd better be diggin' his 'taters. And was there ever such a dirty lookin' young un as Liddy Ann Johnsonses! It was a burnin' shame the way that child was neglected!"

Hannah's walk took her past "the yard," as everybody in Lakeside called the burying-ground, and what was her astonishment to see some men at work setting up a handsome white marble monument on Silas Mason's lot.

"Come right into the settin'-room," said Mrs. Mason, meeting her visitor at the side door. The stately fore-door, with its side lights closely curtained with dotted muslin, was supposed to be used for funerals only, as was also the musty fore-room, which the sun and air seldom entered, except on the days of the semi-annual house cleaning. The sitting-room was a large corner room with three windows. The stove had been moved out for the summer and the floor was covered with a bright-colored rag carpet, which was protected from wear by several braided mats.

"Let me take your bunnit an' shawl, an' here's a palm-leaf fan. Now set right down in that rockin'-cheer," said Mrs. Mason, indicating a large rocker with a chintz covering. A smaller rocker, six wooden chairs, painted dark, a table with slim, twisted legs and covered with an oil cloth on which birds of gay plumage were mingled with flowers of bright hues, and a tall secretary, for Reuben "had a middlin' good edecashun, an' had done town business," completed the furniture.

“Them boarders ’ll hev a good day to th’ Falls. ’Spose they’re a-goin’ up the mountain to look off, hain’t they?” asked Mrs. Mason.

“Land sakes! yes, an’ Isaac says they act like crazy critters ’bout the scenery, an’ ’spect him to tell ’em the name o’ ev’ry hill and pond ’twixt this lake and Mount Washington. Guess they can’t see fur today ’count o’ its bein’ so hazy. D’ you ever hear what Cap’n Jerry Whitcomb told a passel o’ young hands that elimbed up Belknap last summer? They borrowed his glass that he had when he follered the sea. So when they fetched it back, they bragged that they’d seen the ocean. ‘Sho!’ said Cap’n Jerry, ‘Last time I elum up there, I see clean in ter London.’ And that reminds me of what John Hunt, when he was pilot on the big steamboat, said. The water was kind o’ low that year, an’ he was a-tendin’ to his steerin’ pretty close an’ a fussy, little, down-country woman kep’ a-pesterin’ on him with questions. She wanted to know about ev’ry little island an’ rock in the lake, an’ John, he got kind o’ tuckered out with her ’t last. Then says she, ‘Oh, Mr. Pilot, what is that cunning little island out there?’ ‘One o’ the Bahamas, b’ thunder!’ says he, an’ she took the hint an’ shet up. Well, folks will be folks. Them women ’ll ’bout go in ter extersies today over the au-

tumn leaves an' want to stop an' load up the team with 'em, an' the nigh horse won't stan' worth a cent. Fer my part 't al'ays seems dretful sad to see the leaves a-turnin', they drops off so quick. Looks to me like the hectic flush that's the forerunner o' death. My Mary Abby, you know, brightened up in September, then she died when the leaves fell. I nat'rally looked over into the yard as I come along, and what dew you suppose I see?"

"I hain't no idee," was the response.

"Wall, some men was a-settin' up a hansum white marble monument on Silas Masonses lot."

"Land o' liberty! Guess he's a-calc'latin' t' step out suddin', and a-gittin' of his stun up," exclaimed Mrs. Reuben Mason. "I al'ays thought 't was dretful strange though, with as much money 's he's got, that he didn't go to work and fix up his lot, like other folks. The weeds has growed pretty rank on them graves, pore Leviny's and little Ruth's."

"Let me see," said Hannah, picking up a stitch in her knitting, "they've be'n dead goin' on twenty year, hain't they?"

"Twenty-two year come next November," was the answer, "for 't was that fall arter my Silas was born in May."

“How’d Silas git his money anyhow? He hain’t done nothin’ late years.”

“Oh, he saved it and put it out t’ int’rist. Then, you know, ’t don’t cost ’em nothin’ t’ live, they never hev no comp’ny. That eats up all anybody e’n earn. There was Uncle Timothy Jacupses folks, al’ays had a house full, then didn’t hev ’nough to kerry ’em through. Mahaly’s folks is all ’s pore ’s poverty, but I never know’d o’ her havin’ any on ’em a-hangin’ round there, bein’ ’s she’s jest the housekeeper, so I s’pose she don’t feel free to ask ’em, if she has worked there so long.”

“You don’t never go there, do ye? Mebbe that’s a sassy question for me to ask.”

“No, he never forgive Reuben for marryin’ me, ’cause he had a grudge agin father on account o’ polerticks.”

“Bein’ ’s he hain’t got no fam’ly, prob’ly your Silas ’ll come in for a sheer o’ the prop’ty, bearin’ the same name so, though I’ve heerd tell that he was called arter his gran’sir’. You ain’t never knowed o’ no will, I s’pose.”

“No, nor we shouldn’t, he’s so close-mouthed. Most likely he pays Matildy wages, but nobody ever knowed o’ her layin’ up any money. She has good clo’es, though. There hain’t a handsomer Paisley shawl goes in t’ the meetin’-house

than hern. Si," continued Mrs. Mason, "he don't like farm work, and he's a-plannin', if he ever does hev a legacy fall to him, to buy out a store somewheres an' go inter trade."

"'Spose he's a-goin' to marry the Ellswuth girl, hain't he?"

"Wall, I guess it's onsartin'. He don't want to ask her to come here to live 'long o' the old folks, but 'f he could get him a store, he thinks she'd be dretful tickled to be a trader's wife."

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, as she finished off the toe of the "foot'n'" that she was knitting, "I've got my stent done, an' I guess I'd best be a-startin', for Isaac 'll be gittin' back from the mount'in, an' he'll be 's hungry as a bear. What o'clock is it?"

"Only half arter four," said Mrs. Mason, after consulting the tall clock in the kitchen, "an' you hain't a-goin' one step till you've had a dish o' tea 'long o' me. The table 's all sot, an' I've cut one o' my speckled cheeses, an' the tea's on a-drawin'."

So Mrs. Wilson cast on the stitches and set the seams for the mate to the "foot'n'" she had just finished. Then Mrs. Mason appeared in the doorway again, saying, "Now lay down your work an' walk right out to supper."

The two good women sipped their fragrant

tea from the pretty pink cups, Mrs. Mason's wedding present from an aunt that lived down below. They spread the golden butter on the soft "riz" bread, made from "hop emptin's," and ate it with damson preserve and sage cheese. Each had a cup cake and a crisp seed cake, then Mrs. Wilson "jes' tasted" of the fruit cake and both had a cup custard "to top off" with.

"Guess I'll walk out a piece with ye," remarked Mrs. Mason as her guest arose to go. So they walked along together as far as "the yard," and seeing the Mason lot all fixed up, and nobody around, Mrs. Mason said, "Let's step in jest a minute an' take a look on 't."

A vision of the impatient Isaac came up before Hannah Wilson, and she said, "I hadn't oughter stop," but both women went in and, squaring their spectacles across their noses, thoroughly examined the new monument. "SILAS MASON" was engraved in large letters on the front, with the date of his birth, and the word "died," at which Mrs. Mason exclaimed, "My stars!" and Hannah, "Goodness gracious!" The latter continued, "I guess he thinks he hain't long fer this world; sence he had that bad spell down t' the meetin'-house he's be'n kind o' runnin' down. Isaac see him t' other day, an' said his count'nance didn't look well 't all."



“I’ll bate ye one thing,” said Mrs. Mason, “Silas won’t leave all his prop’ty to forrin missions, same ’s Aunt Lois Stone did. D’ you know ’t her niece, Eunice Vittum, that took keer on her in her last sickness, had be’n obleged to call on the townd?”

“How you talk! But there, I do declare, I must hurry along or Isaac ’ll git there fust, an’ he ’ll be all torn out if he can’t git in. I hid the key where I al’ays do, but he ’ll never think to look.”

And sure enough, when Hannah Wilson reached home, there sat Isaac on a box in the barn floor. “Here I’ve be’n settin’ an hour,” said he, but in reality it was not more than five minutes. “Why could n’t ye ’a’ left the key somewheres so ’s ’t I could ’a’ found it? I fumbled round everywhere.”

“Here ’t is, right behind the door-rock, jest where I’ve put it this twenty year,” the good wife answered, but Isaac had to grumble a little, for it was his nature. Soon, however, the hot cream tartar biscuits and the warm stewed apple sauce, for Hannah was as spry as a trap, so the neighbors said, made him forget all petty annoyances.

## II.

It was a cold December day, the snow was falling fast and blowing hither and thither as it fell, so that it was collecting in uneven heaps, piled up high in some places and leaving the frozen ground quite bare in others.

“ ’Tain’t no use to hang out clo’es long’s it’s snowin’ like this,” Hannah Wilson said to herself, as she wiped her wet hands and arms on the roller and looked out at the storm. “I’ll jes’ put ’em to soak.”

At this moment Isaac hurried in, and, stamping the snow from his boots, exclaimed, “Silas Mason ’s dead!”

“You don’t say so! When ’d he die?”

“ ’Twixt four and five this mornin’.”

“How ’d ye hear?”

“ ’Bijah Jones was a-tellin’ on ’t over t’ the store. Land! if I hain’t come off ’thout yer salt fish. I left it layin’ on the counter. I’ll slip right back.”

“Hold on, there won’t nobody kerry it off. What else did ’Bijah say?”

“Wall, he said his woman was up ’fore light this mornin’ so ’s to go to washin’, an’ she was jest a-startin’ of the fire under the arch, when in run Matildy, all out o’ breath, and wanted

that he sh'd go after Doctor Hines, for she b'lieved Silas was a-dyin'. So he jumped into his clo'es 's quick 's ever he could an' run every step o' the way, an' Loizy, she run right back with Matildy. The doctor was to home an' come jest as fast 's he c'd git there, but he said 't wa'n't no use, for Silas was struck with death, an' in about ten minutes he breathed his last. They say Matildy 's all broke up, she sot a store by Silas."

"Folks uster think mebbe he'd marry her sometime," said Hannah, "an' I guess she 'd be'n dretful glad to 'a' had him, but I s'pose she gin it all up years ago."

Soon, through the blinding snow, came the slow tolling of the meeting-house bell, and everybody stopped to count the strokes—seventy-two—and nobody had thought that Silas Mason was quite as old as that, and everybody wondered where the property would go.

"He hain't no kin 'cept Reuben's folks," they said, "an' he never liked Reuben's wife. He opposed the match from the fust on 't. Most likely he 's willed everything to the boy, though he never seemed to take to him much."

Just as soon as she could get away, Hannah Wilson went over and offered her services in the house of mourning. Matilda was so overcome

that she was glad to give up the management, so Hannah was installed as head cook, and spent most of the next day in filling up the great brick oven with beans and brown bread, mince, apple and pumpkin pies.

The funeral was appointed at one o'clock Wednesday. Matildy said, "He hadn't no relations to be sent for, but I sent off a letter by the stage to Union Village, Monday, to invite Brother Ben's folks, then all the neighbors must be asked, or somebody'll feel slighted."

The Tuesday evening stage brought Brother Ben and his wife and their five children, the oldest a girl of ten and the youngest, Baby Ben, whose age was less than a year.

"Matildy Young 'd never dast to hev all o' them young uns there 'f Silas was alive," commented Mrs. Reuben Mason. "Mercy sakes! wouldnt' he 've had a conniption fit?"

"Pore Matildy, she takes it dretful hard," said Hannah Wilson. "S'pose you knowed 't she 'd borrowed Mis' Sawyer's crape bunnit an' veil, didn't ye?"

"Yes," was the reply, "an' I wa'n't a-goin' to be outdid, so I jest sent Si over to Widder Brown's and got her mournin'."

The question as to who should be the chief mourner was warmly discussed. Reuben's wife

said, "Of course his own brother ought to go fust, an' bein' 's I'm his brother's wife, I'd nat'rally set alongside o' my husband. To hev a housekeeper come in afore his own kin, that 'd be a great note."

But Matilda was persistent, and 'Squire Harris, who was authority on all matters in the village, said, "I guess Matildy 'll miss him 's much 's anybody, and feel as bad, too."

So it was arranged that Matilda and Si should go first, then Reuben and his wife, followed by Brother Ben and wife and the four older children, and then the neighbors should all fall into line.

A funeral was an occasion not to be missed and everybody wanted to go early to get a good seat and see the mourners come in. The Orthodox meeting-house, where the Masons had worshiped for three generations, was crowded to its utmost seating capacity, then chairs were brought in from the houses nearby and placed along the aisles and in all other available spaces. Elder Hinkley, who had ministered to this people for nearly thirty years, preached a thrilling sermon, fifty-five minutes long, on the uncertainty of life, then wound up with a harrowing address to the mourners, which was especially affecting, when he spoke of the bereaved companion.

Reuben's wife thought Elder Hinkley was "a-showin' his age" to make such a mistake as that, but most folks supposed he did it to be flowery, "bein' 's how companion sounded so much better 'n housekeeper."

After the preacher had finished, 'Squire Harris, who took charge, arose and said, "The congregation can now have an opportunity to view the remains. You will please pass from the east side of the house round to the west door."

So the people filed slowly past the coffin, some of the oldest ones stopping to touch the corpse, lest they might dream of it. And everybody thought Silas looked very nat'ral.

Returning from the grave, the mourners, the minister's family and the near neighbors went back to the house, where hot tea was given to those who felt chilly, and soon they all sat down at the long table that Hannah and her assistants had laid with great care and looked upon with honest pride.

After everyone had partaken of the feast, for such it was, they all adjourned to the fore-room to hear the will read. 'Squire Harris stood up, cleared his throat and said, "This paper that I hold in my hands is dated nineteen years ago the twentieth of last April and has been in my possession ever since. I drew it up for our deceased

brother, and not a week before he passed from hence, he assured me that it was his last will and testament." Then he proceeded to read the document.

There was one hundred dollars for Elder Hinkley, which statement made that worthy man's face beam with delight. "One hundred dollars for Reuben Mason and one hundred dollars for Silas Mason, his son," continued the 'squire, at which father and son looked very glum, but what astonished the assembly most was the next statement that the house, land and all the interest money were willed and bequeathed to the beloved wife, Matilda Young Mason.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Reuben Mason, jumping up from her chair.

"Mercy sakes!" came from Hannah Wilson, while all eyes were turned toward Matilda, but that little woman only hid her face in her handkerchief and wept.

Then the 'squire produced the marriage certificate dated twenty years back, and told the people that said couple had been united in wedlock by Elder Hinkley, who had kept the secret all these years.

"I'll bate 't was that summer 't yer wife's mother died up in Varmont, an' you an' Mis' Hinkley was off up there an' the meetin'-house

was shet up for two weeks," said Mrs. Reuben Mason. "And I rec'lect at that time Silas an' Matildy went off one day with 'Squire HARRISES old white horse an' chaise, and was gone three days. Folks thought besure they was married, but long 's we didn't hear nothin' more 'bout it, we giv' up that 't wa'n't so." The elder confessed that that was the time, but he never could understand why Silas wasn't willing that the marriage should be made public.

"Well, Silas always was an odd stick," said 'Squire HARRIS, "and I presume he wanted to surprise folks with his will. The money that he's had out to interest foots up to ten thousand dollars."

Amid the chorus of "I want to know," "Dew tell," and "Who 'd 'a' thought it?" the women all went around and shook hands with and congratulated Mrs. Silas Mason, except Reuben's wife, who started for home, telling Hannah WILSON that she 'd never "darken them doors ag'in," and she never did. But there were always some of "Brother Ben's children" in the home of "Aunt Matildy."



## I.

### CAUGHT IN A CYCLONE.

“I d’ know, Luther, but you’ll have ter git ye a wife.” remarked Mrs. Sargent, sitting opposite her son at the breakfast table one beautiful Sunday morning in May.

“Why, ain’t ye feelin’ ’s well ’s common, mother?” asked the son, somewhat alarmed. His mother had never liked to think of his bringing home a wife, and if he ever mentioned any of the girls some criticism was sure to follow.

“Wall,” said she with a sigh, “you must remember ’t I’m gittin’ ’long in years, an’ you can’t hev me al’ays. I sh’ll be seventy-four come the sixteenth day o’ next month, ’f I sh’d live.”

“I don’t see but your vittles is ’s good ’s ever. These beans is sweetened jest right,” said he, filling his plate the second time, “an’ I declare if you hain’t put plums into the brown bread.”

“Seems kind o’ ’stravigant, but I know’d ’t

you liked 'em. Hev a doughnut? Them's extry good, if I do say it."

"Letty Fisher 's a pretty girl," ventured Luther, drinking his coffee.

"Mercy sakes!" said the mother, "I shouldn't want ter git into that fam'ly. Ole Gran' sir' Fisher was tew lazy ter injoy good health, an' Tim's a chip o' the ole block. None o' Susan's folks ever had any gumption, nuther. I know 'em all, root an' branch."

"Fanny Murray sings well," suggested Luther.

"An' that's all she does do," said Mrs. Sargent, "sing an' play on the organ. They say her mother don't put no work on her 't all, but lets her lay abed till nine o'clock in the mornin', an' keeps her breakfast warm. She's a sp'ilin' the gal. I sp'ose it's 'cause she lost all the others."

"How do you like Ellen Lundy?"

"Good land! but Ellen's a smart gal, considerin' what she sprung from. Her mother, though, was Lucy Jane Edwards, in the day of her, an' time was when she held her head 's high 's anybody's. Everybody wondered 't her marryin' Joe Lundy, but she got dis'p'inted, pore soul. She set her life by John Newton, an' 'spected ter marry him, but he went off down below to work an' fell in love with one of them air

city gals with a rich father. It broke Lucy Jane all up. Folks said John wouldn't prosper, an' he didn't. His childern all died with the diphtery. I heerd t'other day 't Alice Stuart was a-comin' up to her Aunt Malviny's ag'in this summer."

"Oh, Alice wouldn't look at me, she's too high toned for country folks," said Luther.

"Wall, she hain't no eall to put on airs. Her father went inter trade down here t' the Corner an' failed up, an' yer pa lost fifty dollars by him, clean cash. They say Sophy Goodwin 's a dretful capable gal," resumed Mrs. Sargent, changing the subject.

"Yes," assented the son, "Sophy 's a nice girl, but she's so bashful I never could get much acquainted with her. Mebbe she wouldn't want such an old bachelor 's I am."

"Sho! your pa was older 'n you be when he got married, an' Sophy 's out of a good fam'ly," continued the mother, "no black sheep on neither side. They say 't the heft o' the Morrill property 's comin' to them, an' the Goodwins is consid'ble fore-handed now. Some folks thinks Ezra's a leetle nigh, but anybody has ter be to hev anything."

Now Luther had been thinking of Sophy the day before, when he was washing the buggy and

oiling the harness; then, besides, when he had braided up Charlie's mane, he had whispered a secret into one of his beautiful pointed ears.

"S'pose you're goin' to meetin' today," he remarked as he got up from the table.

"Yes," was the response. "Miss Greene 's trimmed me up a dretful tasty bunnit with a laylock ribbon on it (I didn't want no ol' woman's bunnit), an' I told her 't I sh'd be out today to christen it, if 't was fair weather."

Elder Abbott lived at the Corner and preached in the brick church there every other Sunday morning, and at the old meeting-house at the Falls, three miles away, on the alternate Sunday afternoons. This was his day at the Corner, and it being so pleasant the house was well filled. Sophy was there, wearing one of the triumphs of Miss Greene's skill, a sun-burned leghorn of the year before, which had been bleached and pressed, the blue ribbon turned and an ornament added. "Nobody 'll mistrust 't ain't a bran' new hat," said the little milliner to the fair wearer, "and the shape 's so becomin'."

From the kindly face of Elder Abbott, above the high desk, the eyes of Luther Sargent wandered to the pretty face of Sophy Goodwin across the aisle. She was listening devoutly to the ser-

mon, which was on the observance of the Sabbath, but he wasn't hearing a word of it.

The Goodwins lived in a neat white cottage a little in from the road, about half way between the Corner and the Falls. They usually attended the day-time services at both churches, but seldom went out for the evening meetings.

In her pretty little room upstairs Sophy sat by the open window reading her Sunday-school book, while in the sitting-room below Mrs. Goodwin sat in the great rocking chair, her spectacles pushed back on the top of her head, and nodded now and then at the *Congregationalist*, spread out on her ample lap. "Father" was stretched out on the lounge in the kitchen, and his breathing indicated that his nap was not likely to be finished before milking time. The boys, Sam and Dick, taking advantage of the situation, had made an early start for the cows down in the south pasture. This unusual promptness was due to a suggestion from Sam that they take a swim in the pond.

As Sophy read on, in the biography of the good missionary, her eyes now and then wandered from the book around the neatly kept room, from the yellow painted floor, almost covered with braided mats, to the pink and white bed quilt, and to the little pictures and keep-

sakes here and there, then out through the white dymity curtains into the world beyond. A beautiful world it was, in all the tints of spring. The trees were just smoothing out their crumpled leaves, and down in the wood lot the hobble-bushes gleamed like drifts of snow in the shimmer of faintest pink and dazzling green. Along the grassy bank of the brook, winding through the opposite field, great bunches of violets held up their purple-bonneted heads. Through the apple orchard the pink buds were bursting into white blossoms and by the roadside patches of bluets looked like tiny sheets of snow, defying the spring sunshine. The dooryard was dotted with May-weed and flecked with dandelion gold, while through the still air, now and then, a sweet bird note sounded.

Just as the tall clock in the kitchen struck five, Sophy saw Luther Sargent drive down the hill and turn into the lane. She ran quickly downstairs to her mother, saying, "What if he asks me to go to ride with him?"

"Well, it's a pleasant day. Slip off that pink calico, put on your new dress an' best hat, an' go."

"What will father say to my going *Sunday night*?"

"Oh, I'll make it all right with your father.

You go to the door an' show Luther into the parlor. Roll up the green paper curtains first. Mind you don't tear 'em," said Mrs. Goodwin, as she dropped her gingham apron, disclosing a white one underneath, a precaution which she always took in case a neighbor might drop in.

In response to Sophy's "Walk in," Luther said, "Guess I won't step inside, I'll stay by Charlie. He don't like to stand very well. I jest drove round to see if you wouldn't like to go to ride, the weather 's so fine."

Mrs. Goodwin came out, sat down on the door-rock and inquired how Luther's mother was this spring, if she had commenced to make cheese yet, and how many acres of corn he was "cale'latin' " to plant.

In a few minutes Sophy was ready. "It seems to be cloudin' up a little over there in the west, but I s'pose there hain't no need o' your takin' an umbrell," said Mrs. Goodwin as the couple drove off.

Soon they were so busy talking of other things that the weather was forgotten. Sophy loved horses and Charlie turned back his pretty ears to listen to her praises of his glossy coat and beautiful wavy mane.

Suddenly Luther exclaimed, "It's sort o' breezin' up!" and looking around, he saw a

large black cloud, of a peculiar shape, rolling up in the sky. "Shure 's preachin', Sophy, there's a shower a-comin'. It's funder back to your house than 'tis up to ourn. Guess you'll hev to go home with me an' wait till it's over."

Just then Charlie felt the whip on his back, an unusual sensation, but apparently taking in the situation, he started off for a race with the storm. Soon the dust whirled in clouds, the tender new leaves were flying through the air, and the big drops began to fall.

"'Tain't no use," said Luther, "we sh'll hev to drive up here to the next house. You know Leander Perry's folks, don't ye? An' their barn door 's open."

Leander Perry had been "raised" in that neighborhood, but when quite a young man had gone West, where he had remained several years, with varying fortunes. When asked why he returned to his old home, he had said, "As soon 's I got a little ahead, 'long 'd come a *cyclone* an' sweep away everything, so I reckoned I'd come back to New England, where they didn't hev sich things."

Leander came hurrying out to the barn to greet his guests, saying, "Wall, 'f I was out West I sh'd say we was in fer a reg'lar *cyclone*."



Luther jumped out, but Sophy, feeling somewhat bashful, as she was not acquainted with Mrs. Perry, said she would rather sit in the buggy. So they fastened Charlie in the corner of the barn next the shed. Soon, however, the women-folks came out and prevailed upon Sophy to go into the house with them.

No sooner were they all seated in the sitting-room than the storm grew rapidly worse. The rain swept in blinding sheets across the field, and it grew so dark that they could barely see the outlines of the swaying trees across the road. The old house fairly rocked with each gust of wind; then came a sharp flash of light, followed by a terrific crash that almost stunned them. When they had recovered sufficiently to look from the windows the clouds were lifting, and the returning light revealed the dooryard littered with bricks from the great chimney and broken branches from the trees, while the barn was lying in a heap, only a little corner next the shed standing.

Charlie whinnied and stretched out his neck as he heard his master's step approaching, but his eyes protruded wildly and he was trembling all over. Hemmed in by piles of rafters and broken boards, they found him unharmed, however, save for a few scratches. A big beam had

fallen across the seat of the buggy, "Right where you'd 'a' be'n settin', Sophy," said Luther, and they shuddered as they thought of the narrow escape.

"Might 's well hev staid out West as ter come on here ter git rid o' cyclones," remarked Mrs. Perry. "I reckon we fetched 'em back with us."

"Wall, I'm mighty thankful we hadn't no live stock in that barn," said her husband. "I d' know, though, but we've lost old Ruth. I found her with a couple o' kittens up on the hay-mow yisterday. I meant to 'a' drowneded 'em, but it slipped my mind. What's that?" and approaching the object in question, he found it to be the remains of a very small gray kitten. "We shall miss old Ruth, she was such a good mouser," he added. Then his little daughter, Susie, began softly calling, "Ruthie, Ruthie, kitty, kitty, kitty!" while her gentle blue eyes filled with tears. In a few minutes, however, there came slowly creeping out from under the woodshed an old three-colored cat, with a little black kitten in her mouth.

Luther was obliged to borrow Mr. Perry's wagon to take Sophy home, and on the way they counted five great barns that lay like huge piles of kindling wood by the roadside.

“I’ve be’n all up in arms ’bout ye!” exclaimed Mrs. Goodwin, as she came running out at the sound of wheels, “but father said of course you’d drive in somewheres.”

The Goodwin home, fortunately, was on the outer edge of the storm, and so knew little of its fury.

“I must hurry home and see ’f mother ’s all right,” said Luther, adding something in a low voice to Sophy, at which she blushed and nodded. When he had driven away, she said, “I guess I’ve spoilt my hat, an’ I’m ’fraid my dress ’ll cockle. What did father say? I s’pose ’f I’d been killed, he’d thought ’t was a judgment for going Sunday night.”

“Law, child! He never said a word. He al’ays sot a sight by the Sargents. Never mind yer hat, it’s be’n done over. ’Tain’t ’s ’f ’t was new. Now run right up stairs an’ take off them damp clo’es. I’ve got a fire in the kitchen to dry ’em by. The teakittle ’s a-b’ilin’ an’ I’m goin’ to fix ye up some hot drink.”

When Sophy came down, wearing her second best dress, with a bright new ribbon at her throat, the boys were just coming in with their pails of foaming milk.

“Whew, Soph!” exclaimed Sam, “what ye so dressed up for, jest bed time?”

“Bet her beau ’s comin’ back. Let’s watch,” slyly whispered Dick, as Mrs. Goodwin looked into the parlor to see if there was plenty of oil in the big lamp.

Luther found that his house was not in the path of the cyclone and, save for uneasiness on his account, his mother had not been disturbed by it. So, after giving Charlie his supper, and hurriedly doing the chores, he hitched Fan into the old wagon and drove back to finish out his call on Sophy, as he told his mother. That good woman said to herself, as she locked up and went to bed, at early candle light, “I vum, ’f he hain’t started out ’n airnest!”

Sam and Dick slept in the open chamber in the ell, and long after they were supposed to be sound asleep, they crept noiselessly down the back stairs, tip-toed across the kitchen and out round the corner of the house, under the parlor windows, but the green paper shades were down tight, and reflected no shadows. Softly the boys stole upstairs again and tumbled into bed.

“How sh’d you like to be ridin’ out with yer best gal an’ git ketched in a cyclone?” giggled Sam.

“Guess we’d got ketched in a cyclone ’f dad ’d knowed ’t we’d been in swimmin’ Sunday,” answered Dick.

“Our Soph ’s got a feller, ’s true ’s you live,” yawned Sam, and dropped off to sleep.

Sam was right in his surmises, for Luther continued to spend his Sunday evenings with Sophy.

One afternoon, when his mother and sister had gone strawberrying, the mischievous Diek went into the parlor and punched a hole in the paper curtain, at the window next the orchard. The next Sunday night the boys climbed out on the roof of the shed, dropped down into the grass, and crept along to the parlor window. For about fifteen minutes they took turns peeping in through the hole in the curtain, but the couple inside were simply conversing in a very staid and proper manner.

“There they set, straight ’s two stieks, a-holdin’ on t’ the old photygraph album!” impatiently exclaimed Sam. “This hain’t no fun. Come on! Let’s go baek to bed.”

Luther had said to Sophy, “The hot weather ’s a-takin’ holt o’ mother more ’n common this year, but I guess she can git along whilst the Fourth.” And so the day was set.

Mrs. Abe Johnson, the nearest neighbor, as soon as she heard the news, dropped in to talk it over with Sophy’s mother. “’Pears to me they’ve made quick work on ’t,” said she.

“Guess Luther ’s a-makin’ up fer lost time. S’pose his mother needs help, long ’s they hev work folks in hayin’ time. They say the ole lady ’s a leetle diffikilt. but Sophy ’s so quiet most proberble they’ll git along middlin’ well, an’ Luther has the name o’ bein’ a good provider. You’re pleased with it, hain’t ye?” and she drew a melancholy sigh.

“I guess anybody ’d be proud to git into that fam’ly,” answered Mrs. Goodwin, with a toss of her head. “One o’ Luther’s great grandfathers on his mother’s side was governor o’ the state.” And poor little Mrs. Johnson sighed again. for she had an only daughter, too, and hers “hadn’t married well.”

On the glorious Fourth of July, Sophy, in a pretty white muslin dress and a white leghorn hat with white ribbons and a long white feather, came out to meet Luther, who had just driven up with Charlie, whose proudly arched neck wore the waviest of manes. The buggy had been repaired by honest Zeke Felch, the wheelwright, who had said, “I’ll warrant it jest as good ’s new.”

As they drove along the beautiful river road towards Elder Abbott’s, they spoke of that Sunday night when they were overtaken by the storm.

“I come pretty nigh a-losin’ ye, right in the fust on ’t, didn’t I?” said Luther.

“I guess we’ll never forget the cyclone,” responded Sophy.

That evening the good neighbors gathered at the Sargent homestead to congratulate the newly married couple, for there hadn’t been a wedding in the neighborhood “since they didn’t know when.” The band boys came up from the Corner and played a serenade, then all were treated to lemonade and cake, each young girl keeping a piece of the wedding cake to put under her pillow and dream on.

A few of the friends brought some modest gifts to the bride, but little Susie Perry’s present delighted her most of all. It was a small black kitten, and his name was Cyclone.





## I.

### THEIR OTHER MOTHER.

“School is dismissed!” said the master, and the troop of boys and girls, dinner-pails in hand, swarmed out of the old red school-house on Carr Hill.

When the schoolmaster was left alone, he sat down behind his desk, placed his elbows on the top of it and dropped his face into his hands. He had assumed this attitude so often that his coat sleeves were almost worn through. He was trying very hard to solve a difficult problem, a question that had perplexed him for months. He knew his Colburn’s Mental Arithmetic from cover to cover, but that knowledge did not help him the least in this case. “Lucy or Ruth, which shall it be?” That was the question.

It was one of those short days, early in January, and there had been a heavy snow-storm the night before. In the morning the men were on hand with their ox-teams to break out the roads, and the children had a ride to school on the great sleds, but they were allowed to trudge

home by themselves at night, although the traveling was "pretty loose."

The boys had their long pants tied down tight around their ankles with strong strings. They wore warm spencers buttoned up to their chins, bright-colored tippets wound around their necks and home-made caps drawn over their ears. Their woolen mittens were knit in various designs, some in tiny stripes of blue and white, with tufted wrists, and others in the more intricate fox and geese pattern. The girls had "old foot'n's" drawn over their stout shoes. They were clad in checked woolen dresses and heavy shawls, which were mostly of the changeable red and green, or blue and yellow center and striped border style, and had descended to the wearer from some older member of the family. Their ears and necks were protected by their large pumpkin hoods, and many of the older ones wore white mittens knit of very fine yarn, or in fancy stitches, and proudly displayed as their own work. The smaller children had attached to the wrists of their mittens, which were chiefly red or some combination of red and white, striped or dotted, a long cord that went around the neck. This was a safeguard against the danger of separation, which constantly threatened such little mates.

As the merry company went along, they shouted and pelted each other's backs with snowballs, and "made their images" in the soft snowbanks beside the road, while some of the larger boys caught the little girls and washed their faces in the new snow until their cheeks glowed like roses. When they reached a lane leading to a great two-story, yellow house, the Abbott children, Benny and Sarah, stopped and the others plodded on.

Lorenzo Abbott had the name of being the thriftiest farmer in the neighborhood, and his children were brought up to work. It was not long before Benny had on his old jacket and was filling the big wood-box, whistling as he went back and forth from the kitchen to the wood-shed. Sarah, meanwhile, had tied on a big checked apron and was setting the table. First she filled the apple-sauce bowl with frozen boiled cider apple-sauce from the great firkin in the buttery and set it on the back of the stove to thaw. Then she brought out the cold baked beans, for Uncle Ben liked them, and cut the "riz" bread in thick slices, and the cheese in little squares. She put a ball of butter in the little blue butter-plate that was Grandmother Turner's, and set the pumpkin pie in the stove oven and the tea "a-steepin'," while her mother was busy frying the pancakes.

It was dark when Uncle Ben got home from school. They heard him stamping his feet in the entry and brushing the snow from his boots with the broom.

“Had to keep somebody after school, didn’t ye?” asked Mrs. Abbott, as the teacher entered.

“No,” replied Ben, lighting a candle in one of the brass candlesticks that stood on the high mantel, “I was working on a sum.” Then he went “up chamber” to his room. In a few minutes he came down, wearing a false white shirt front, carefully fitted over his plaid flannel shirt, a new paper collar, and a bright blue necktie. He had on his best coat and over his arm hung his schoolcoat. “Jane,” said he to his sister, “this coat seems to be giving out on the elbows. I wonder if you can’t darn it a little?”

“What, that hain’t come to mendin’ soon ’s this, I hope?” exclaimed Mrs. Abbott.

A pair of Sunday boots were quietly stood behind the stove without disturbing the slumber of the cat or the dog, and immediately little Ben produced the pot of grease, for he always had the job of greasing Uncle Ben’s boots, and was duly rewarded with a few coppers to put into his bank.

“Guess Ruth an’ Lucy ’s a-goin’ to have comp’ny ag’in tonight,” he slyly whispered to Sarah, who answered by a suppressed giggle.

“S’pose you’re goin’ to be to home tonight, hain’t ye, Ben?” asked Mr. Abbott, giving his wife a knowing look, as they all sat down to the supper table. “Bill Sanborn ’s jest drove along an’ threw out the mail. The *New York Ledger* ’s come. Didn’t know but you’d read to us a little. I sh’d like to hear how that continood story ’s a-comin’ out.”

“Maybe Ben ’s more interested in his own story just now,” suggested Mrs. Abbott.

“Horace Colby’s be’n a-helpin’ me chop to-day, up in the Uncle Sol Wiggins woodlot,” continued Mr. Abbott. “Poor Horace, I guess he has a hard time on’t. The place belongs to his wife an’ her sister, Susan, you know. He says all ’t he owns is the old white horse; everything else is in their hands an’ him an’ Susan don’t hitch. Says he, ‘If I ’s to live my life over ag’in, I sh’d never marry two wimmen ’t once, one ’t a time ’s a great plenty.’ Parse along that apple sarse, Ben.”

Ben Turner had lived in the other part of the old house with his mother until she died at an advanced age. Since the mother’s death, he had lived in his sister Jane’s family, and, although they were all very fond of “Uncle Ben,” still he wanted a home of his own.

Down on the “South Road” lived Lucy Pierce

and Ruth Fellows. Lucy owned the old 'Squire Pierce place, one of the best farms in town, and Ruth was a sort of adopted sister, who had lived there ever since she was a little girl. Lucy's father and mother had died a few years before and quite recently the "Uncle Joseph," who had always lived in the family, so now the two girls were left alone. Lucy, whose health had always been delicate, sang and played on the melodeon, while the handsome, rosy-cheeked Ruth did most of the work.

Ben Turner had been going there evening after evening, trying to make up his mind. Could Lucy keep house without Ruth? Would Ruth leave Lucy? Perhaps so, but then there was Lucy's money that would be very convenient, and he did so love to hear her sing. Evidently, if he wanted money, accomplishments and a good housekeeper, he must take the two, but which should be Mrs. Turner. Of course it must be Lucy. He must ask her tonight, and he felt reasonably sure of his answer.

It was apparent that the girls were expecting company that evening, for a bright fire blazed in the west room and before the fire sat Ruth with her knitting, and Lucy holding Buff, the old yellow cat. When Ben Turner entered they were earnestly discussing a letter that Ruth had re-

ceived that afternoon. Her Uncle Jack, a sea captain, who was supposed to have been lost at sea, some twenty years ago, had returned to his native land. His first thought was to look up the little niece that went to live with "Square Purse's folks." At a tavern, in a distant seaport town he had had a "shock," so he had dictated a letter to his niece, Ruth, asking if she were living and free to do so, would she come to care for her helpless old uncle. He might need her for a short time only, or it might be for a year or two. She should be well paid for her services, and at the end the property that was left should be hers.

What should she do? She did not want to leave Lucy and her uncle was not able to come there. Ben thought he saw a way out of the difficulty, but waited for a favorable opportunity to propose his plan. The evening was spent much as usual, Ben popping corn and telling stories, and Lucy singing his favorite songs. Then Ruth went down cellar to get some apples. She purposely used as much time as possible in selecting the great golden pippins and the handsome red Baldwins, and polished them until they looked like an exhibit at a county fair. When Ruth returned, as she suspected it might

be, it was all arranged for her to go to care for Uncle Jack.

Soon after Ruth's departure Ben and Lucy were quietly married and very cosily settled at the old Pierce place. School had closed, and Ben having settled the great question of his life, or "figured out the answer to his sum," as he told his sister, decided to give up teaching and turn his attention wholly to farming. The scholars, however, remembered their teacher pleasantly, and one moonlight night they came down with fifes, drums, dinner horns and tin pans, and gave him a rousing serenade. On being invited in, one of the number presented a marvelous photograph album holding four pictures on a page. Then the merry crowd were treated to apples and cider, and each had a slice of the big wedding cake that Sister Jane had made for the bride.

For nearly two years Ben and Lucy Turner lived very happily together. As Lucy was not strong enough to do anything hard, her greatest trials were her experiences with various hired girls, for she never found anyone who could do the work as Ruth had done it. Throughout the neighborhood, however, she was esteemed for her kindness of heart and for her good deeds, particularly to the poor, the aged and the sick. One chill December day, when she was return-



ing from a visit to an old bed-ridden woman, she took a violent cold that ended in quick consumption. She had often said, jokingly, "If I should die you must marry Ruth, unless some one else gets her first." So, when it became evident that she was really going away from Ben, she asked him to promise her that he would sometime, if it were possible, bring back Ruth to take her place in the old home.

When it was all over, poor Ben was more lonely, disconsolate and altogether wretched than he had ever supposed it possible for a mortal to feel. "The Widder Hunt" kept house for him a while, then her daughter, Belinda, came down with the measles. "It beats all," said Mrs. Hunt. "I never e'd go anywheres but suthin 'd al'ays turn up with B'lind'. There hain't be'n no measles round here, but I'll bate she ketched 'em o' somebody t' the Bridge the day she went off up there to do her tradin'. 'Twill be jes' two weeks come tomor-rer. They's apt ter go hard with grown folks, an' she's so dark-complected I'm afraid they won't come out well. Time she's up an' round the childern 'll all be down flat." When Mrs. Hunt left to care for her sick daughter, Aunt Nabby Smith came to take her place.

"Gals to do housework is dretful scurse. They

all wants to be a-goin' off down below t' work in the factory," said she. Aunty Nabby was nearly seventy-three. "I'm a-livin' on borrowed time, I know, but I'm a-goin' to make the most on 't," she told Ben, and as she was quite vigorous, she did very well until one day she fell down the back stairs and broke her arm, and had to go back to her son's. The next house-keeper was pretty little Myra Newcomb. She was only eighteen but smart as a trap. "Ben 's solemn 's a graveyard all the time an' I just can't stand it any longer," was what she told Tom Sanders, her lover, when she had been there a few weeks, so the next time Tom called, Myra rode away with him to the minister's, and Ben was left alone again. Finally, Sister Jane prevailed upon him to sell off the stock, close up the house and come back to them. Thus more than a year and a half had passed away, and folks wondered if Ben Turner would ever seem like his old self again.

At the time of Lucy's death, Uncle Jack required Ruth's constant attention, and a few weeks later he died. Ben knew that Ruth lived alone in the little cottage that her uncle had left to her, and that she sometimes went out doing plain sewing, for she was very skillful with her needle, but Ben did not know that a nice bach-

elor neighbor occasionally called. Folks said that he was rich, that he owned the *Sea King* on which he sometimes made a voyage. He would gladly have been more than friendly and tried to interest Ruth in a trip around the world. She, however, realized that she had always cared for Ben Turner more than she was willing to admit to herself even, so she patiently waited.

One evening Ben decided to write to Ruth and tell her of Lucy's dying wish. He did not want to post his letter in the village office lest the postmaster might notice it and have his suspicions aroused, but he excited great curiosity in the Abbott family the next day by driving off to a neighboring town. For the next three weeks he watched anxiously for an answer and he had about made up his mind to write again, for he could not believe Ruth would treat the matter so indifferently, if she had received his letter. Meanwhile he was so absent-minded that he was more of a puzzle to the Abbott children than ever.

The postoffice was in the righthand corner as one entered the village store. On the shelves beyond stood rows of glass cans filled with red and white striped sticks of candy, gum drops and peppermints. Next came bars of various kinds of soap and boxes of tobacco. In the la-

beled drawers beneath were tea, coffee and spices, cream of tartar, saleratus and starch. The scales stood on the counter near the center and at the end was the cheese box, with the cracker barrel, hospitably open, just underneath, and in line were the sugar barrels, the white, the brown and the maple with its tempting lumps. On the side opposite the postoffice was the long showcase containing neckties, gloves and handkerchiefs of all grades, from the coarse red cotton to the silk bandanna, also various fancy articles. The shelves behind were filled with boxes of paper collars and rows of calico and delaine, cambric, silesia and factory cloth. There were hats and caps, women's shoes and men's long-legged boots, and in a corner there were bundles of palmleaf and a pile of braided hats. Folded up on a long table was an assortment of men's ready-made clothing, protected from dust by a cambric cover. The shelves nearby were loaded with crockery, and the space beyond was divided into little compartments filled with bolts, screws and hinges, door-latches and cupboard catches, while in a row of open nail kegs underneath could be seen the different sizes of nails. A glimpse into the back store showed other shelves, sagging with the weight of stone jars, brown earthen milk pans, speckled pud-

ding dishes, yellow mixing bowls and blue-edged pie plates, while hanging from the beams overhead were jugs and water pails. There were barrels of flour and bushel baskets heaped with bunches of dried apple, the shriveled quarters dangling from the broken strings, and near the scale, where folks liked to step on and get weighed, was the pile of salt fish. It was the habit of customers to help themselves to a bit of fish, but it was not considered etiquette to sample one that had not already been somewhat stripped, as the notice tacked on the wall plainly showed. This was a piece of white pasteboard on which in large black letters one read the statement, "It is mean to tear a whole fish." Beyond was the large bin filled with coarse salt and above it the pen where the paper rags were kept, a partition separating the white from the brown.

Around the great box stove near the center of the store was the usual group of loafers. Beniah Dexter, an old man with long, white beard, was telling stories of the times when he drove the stage, whittling as he talked. Cy Slocum, a stout, red-faced man, was listening. Cyrus was a horse doctor by profession, but most of his comfortable property had been acquired in trading horses. Jerry Foss had just come in and

was perched on a high stool in front of the stove with his damp feet on the hearth. Jerry's wife kept boarders, and his part of the work was to bring in the supplies, for which she paid the bills. Uncle "Samwel" Hackett was tipped back reading a paper. He was an elderly man, "clever" but not very energetic. In some unaccountable way he had persuaded the village dressmaker, Cynthia Thompson, who was some twenty years his junior, to marry him and support him. Cynthia, of course, heard all the town gossip, and Uncle Samwel's chief occupation was reporting it at the store. People kept coming to the office, for this was paper day and everybody was eager to get the *Democrat*, in which they found all the county news and many items of interest from all over the state. Some stopped to speak a few minutes with the group by the stove.

"Look a-here!" called out Uncle Samwel from behind his paper, "Ruth Fellers 's married!"

"Ye don't say!" exclaimed Jerry Foss. "Everybody had her picked out fer Ben Turner."

"Lor', yes," said Uncle Samwel. "I s'pected 'twas all cut 'n' dried 'n' ready to light soon 's his year was up."

"Wall," continued Jerry, "mebbe she didn't

want to play no second fiddle." He had not forgotten the Sunday night when Ruth refused to let him see her home from prayer-meeting, just after Ella May Parker had given him the mitten.

"She always was consid'ble of a high-stepper," remarked Cy Slocum, as he recalled a similar experience.

"My cousin, Drusilla Veasey, 't nussed her in her last sicknes, told me 't was Lucy's request," put in Cap'n Clark, who was standing behind the stove funnel.

"Ben was all broke up over losin' of her an' he don't begin t' set up 'n' take notice 's quick 's some on 'em does," observed Beniah Dexter.

Just then the door opened and in walked Ben Turner himself. As he came along and set a sugar bucket on the counter and an oil can on the floor near by, said Unele Samwel in a low tone, "Speakin' o' angels, you're sure to hear 'em a-flappin' of their wings," then, in a louder voice, "How d' do? We was jest a-wond'rin' 'f you'd heerd the news 'bout Ruth Fellers."

"No," responded Ben, turning very white and taking hold of the counter, as a reason for his unanswered letter flashed through his mind.

"She hain't dead, only married," Unele Sam.

wel hastened to add. "It 's in this 'ere paper that was sent to my woman from a second cousin o' hern 't lives down on the coast, she 't was Elviry Flanders an' uster work up ter John Pettingill's on Bean Hill. 'T last accounts she was the Widder Small and was a-keepin' house fer a man named Isr'el Ware. Seems she 's a-roped 'im in, fer here's their marriage, marked with a blue lead pencil. This 's her third ventur'. She's kind o' subjc' ter gettin' married, same 's ol' Orrin Peters said his fam'ly was ter the measles. Lookin' 'long down the marriages, lo an' behold! there was Ruth Fellerses' name. She's married to Captain Augustus Robinson, and they've gone on a voyage to Spain, it says."

Ben got his mail and started toward the door, when Dick Wells, the clerk, shouted, "Hain't you goin' to take your sugar 'n' carryseen?" He stepped back for them, then quietly went out.

"Turribly cut up, wa'nt he?" remarked Jerry.

"I sh'd say he was," responded Cy. "He didn't hardly know whether he was foot or horse-back."

As Ben drove slowly home, he said to himself, "Married to a sea captain! Gone to the ends



of the earth! And she didn't even send me her wedding card."

The Abbotts grew still more concerned about Uncle Ben, for he seemed gloomier than ever. As he said nothing about what he had heard at the store, they did not get the news until the next Sunday, between meetings, when it was the general topic of conversation.

"That," said Jane to Lorenzo, as they walked up the aisle together to take their places for the afternoon service, "accounts for his bein' so awful down 'n the mouth for the last two three days."

Just before Ruth Fellows that was stepped on board the ship, a letter was handed her by a friend, who had come to see her set sail. In the confusion, however, the letter was laid down and forgotten. For the first two weeks of the voyage the captain's young wife was too seasick to take much interest in her surroundings, but when she was recovering, one day she came across the letter directed, in an unfamiliar hand, to Ruth Fellows. On reading it, she found that it was not designed for herself at all, but was, doubtless, of great importance to some other Ruth Fellows. As soon as there was an opportunity, the letter was sent back, but it was

many weeks before it found the lady for whom it was intended.

Great was the surprise of Ben Turner when he received the answer to his letter, written so long ago. It seemed almost as if Lucy herself had come back to him. "The sea, at least," he said, "if not the grave, has given up its dead." As soon as he could get away, he started for the seaport town, where he found Ruth awaiting his coming and ready to return with him as the second Mrs. Turner, to live again at the Pierce place.

Among the new things that found their way into the old house with the return of Ruth was a large crayon portrait that hung on the wall in the west room. It was an enlarged copy of an old daguerreotype of Lucy, whose memory in that household was ever held sacred.

One of the first things that little Lucy Turner could remember was being held up to that picture and told that it was her father's other wife, whose name she bore. Her father's other wife, she supposed, must be her other mother. That was the name she gave to the picture and by that name it was always called.

"Uzzer muzzer" were the first words that Baby Jack learned to lisp, and when company came to the house the children were very proud

of showing the picture of their "other mother." Together they played for hours around her grave in the old burying-yard near by, and through the long summers, for many years, until they left the old home for homes of their own, the children of Ruth never failed to keep fresh flowers on the grave of Lucy, their "other mother."



## NATHAN'S WIFE.

“Seems to me your cold ’s worse, mother,” remarked Nathan Marston, as he passed his plate for a second piece of pie. “This is a grand, good apple pie,” continued he, “but I’m afraid you’ve ketched more cold standin’ in that chilly pantry a-rollin’ out pie crust.”

“I fetched the cake-board out on’ t’ the kitchen table, but the flour did feel kind o’ cold to my hands,” replied Mrs. Marston.

“Well, you’ll have to be awful careful,” cautioned the son, “or you’ll be down sick. There’s a lot of influenzy ’round. I see the doctor drivin’ up by this forenoon, but he was goin’ so fast I didn’t have a chance to holler an’ ask who was sick.”

“I s’pose ’t was the young man,” said Mrs. Marston.

“Yes, Doctor John,” was the reply. “He has the heft of the practice now. The old doctor don’t visit patients much.”

“John ’s got a dretful pretty sort of a little woman for a wife. He met with her when he was off a-takin’ of his medical lectur’s, so his

mother told me when I was talkin' with her down to Elder Batchelder's donation."

"Yes, the fellers hev all got married but me," said Nathan soberly.

"Wall, ye don't need no wife 's long 's ye hev me ter keep house fer ye," responded the old lady. Then she quickly changed the subject, for this was a sore topic, and one that she avoided discussing. "Ye're a-goin' ter haul wood down t' the village this arternune, hain't ye? 'Cause 'f ye bc I've got some arrants ter send by ye t' the store."

"Yes," was the answer, "I promised Mr. Bixby, the new tavern-keeper, that I'd git him down a cord this week, sure, an' I thought I'd best go today whilst the sleddin' 's good, for fear there might come a thaw an' sp'ile it."

"Here's the aigs," said Mrs. Marston, producing an old battered ten-quart pail. "I packed 'em in bran an' I guess they'll ride all right 'f you're keerful. There's three derzern an' eight. Wonder what aigs is fetchin' now! They're ruther skurse this time o' year an' prob'ly Carter 's payin' a shillin' 't least. I'm 'bout out o' tea, an' ye may git me a quarter of oolong an' a quarter of souchong; then I want a couple yards o' dark caliker fer an apern, small figger an' suthin 't won't fade all out fust time

it's washed. If there's any more a-comin' to me I'll take it up in a few cents wuth o' pep'-mints an' a leetle han'ful o' eloves."

As she wearily gathered up the dishes and placed them in the dish-pan, from the window in front of the sink, she saw Nathan start off for the village with his load of wood. She heard the crunching of the sled runners in the snow and watched the oxen as they made the turn at the gate and went slowly down the hill and out of sight. It was a beautiful winter afternoon and the white-crusted fields, with their criss-crossing of gray stone walls, glistened in the sunshine.

Mrs. Marston got the dishes washed somehow, then throwing a heavy shawl over her she laid down on the kitchen lounge and Sir Thomas, the old Maltese cat, with his white nose tucked under a white paw, coiled himself at her feet.

Across the road, diagonally from the Marstons', lived Simeon Downes. Simeon worked out much of the time, and just now was hauling logs for the saw-mill. As he required an early breakfast and carried his dinner, Mandy, his wife, had a good long day, and occupied most of her spare time in binding shoes. She was sitting by the window at work when Nathan went past, and said to herself, "Now Mis' Marstin 's

all alone, so I'll jes' take my shoes an' slip over an' set with her a spell. She can't git out much an' she does love ter hear what 's goin' on 'round." Then Mandy put in a stick of wood and shut up the stove, looked to see where the cat was, and, throwing a shawl over her head, went across to the Marston house, going around to the back door and entering the kitchen, where, much to her surprise, she found Mrs. Marston lying down.

"For mercy's sake!" she exclaimed. "Be you sick?"

"Only a leetle cold, so I thought I'd jes' camp down here. Take the rockin'-cheer. I'm dretful glad ye've come in. I guess I'll git up."

"No, you stay right where you be. We can talk jest 's well. I 's down t' the Cotton girls last night, an' I've got a lot o' news to tell you."

The Cotton girls were two maiden sisters living in a one-story, unpainted house in the outskirts of the village. Judith, the elder, was now about eighty, and Polly three years younger. Zepheniah Cotton had been a well-to-do cabinet-maker, who had left to his family the home place and some interest money besides. The widow, a frail little woman, who for years did not go beyond her own dooryard, outlived her husband some twenty years and died at the advanced age



of ninety-six. Neither of the daughters had ever been strong. Judith's particular affliction was rheumatism in her knees, while Polly suffered at times with asthma. Judith did fine needlework, which for many years had taken the first premium at the county cattle show. In the more prosperous families, the infants, on state occasions, were wrapped in soft blankets, in the corners of which blossomed great roses, and below hung the long flannel petticoat bordered with a marvelous vine where leaves alternated with clusters of grapes, all in white silk embroidery, the work of Judith Cotton. The fine stitching on the pleated bosoms of the men's Sunday shirts was done by her skillful fingers. She had made the wrought collars that the women wore, fastened with a great cameo pin, around the large necks of their best gowns, and all garments of importance in the community were sent over for her to make the buttonholes. Polly did the housework, occupying her spare time with knitting and patchwork. She also made beautiful mats, which she braided very fine, shading the colors.

Some neighbor's boy always hoed their garden in the summer and shoveled their paths in the winter, also did chores for them and errands at the store. Although they did not go about

themselves, many people had the habit of running in there, and, as each one had something to tell, they were always well posted in the current gossip, and, as Mandy Downes said, "What they didn't know wa'n't wurth knowing," but some folks called Mandy pretty newsy.

"How be the girls this winter?" asked Mrs. Marston.

"Oh, jest the same as they al'ays have be'n ever sence I e'n remember," replied Mandy, who was only fifty-five. "Judith was a-tellin' me 'bout Ase Hatches' new wife. He fetched her home last week. She belonged down in the lower part o' the state, an' he come acrost her last summer, when he was off down there a-vis'tin' 'mongst his fust wife's relations. She's a connection o' hern. Everybody thinks he's waited a reasonable time, an' that it's a very suitable match. She's some younger 'n Ase, but she hain't no spring chicken. It's better for the childern than 's if he'd took up with some young flirt, same 's Oliver Blake did. I guess Irene 'd 'a' turned over 'n her grave 'f he had. D' you know 't Oliver an' his wife 'd parted? Yes, he's posted her, an' now she's tryin' to git a bill."

"What d' ye s'pose Rhody Fuller had ter say 'bout Ase a-goin' off ter git married?" in-

quired Mrs. Marston. "She 's be'n boss an' all hands fer so long, it'll come kind o' hard t' have ter take a back seat. They're a-calc'latin' ter keep her, hain't they?"

"Oh, yes. Good land! they couldn't spin a thread 'thout Rhody, an' she sets her life by the boys, though they do pester her most to death, an' they're such 'normous eaters 't she says she sca'ce has a chance to hang the cake-board up over night. They say 't she told Ase that she sh'd think there was old maids 'nough nigher home 'thout his goin' clean off down to Ippin' for one. I shouldn't be a bit s'prised 'f she thought she was goin' to ketch him herself, but he'd be one 't would look out an' git in where there was money, an' it's reported this woman's had quite a fortin fall to her. They 'peared out last Sunday. You know I set in a wing pew, so I see everybody that's there an' all that's goin' on. I wouldn't swap our pew for airy one in the meetin'-house. I c'n watch 'em up in the singin'-seats an' see Josiah Winslow noddin' away with one arm on his old bass-viol, an' Mis' Hawkins a-tryin' to keep her face straight when she looks over to them Kimball young uns in the pew front o' me. Of all the performances that they go through, you never see the beat. Their mother says she druther wash than take

'em to meetin' any day. 'Squire Eastman, when he hain't a-playin' the seraphine, has his eye on that boy o' hisn, t' see 't he hain't a-readin' dime novils. Calline Tasker sings the treble now—she's be'n off an' took lessons—an' they've got the schoolmaster up int' the seats, too. He an' Calline looks 't one another more'n they doos t' the minister. Dan'el Gilman 's a-takin' the lead now an' you'd jest oughter see him bite his tunin' fork an' beat the time. When the folks stand up an' turn 'round facin' the singers, then I have a chance to see all their new clo'es. Sim says I'd oughter think o' more serious things on the Sabbath day, but I tell 'im I guess there's some worldly talk out in the horse-sheds 't noon-time."

"But, Mandy," interrupted Mrs. Marston, "hain't yer goin' ter tell me how the bride was dressed?"

"My soul and body! I come nigh fergittin' that. Wall, she had on a blue an' yeller changeable silk gown, made with a long p'int in front an' hooked up in the back, an' small flowin' sleeves with wrought under sleeves. She wore a cashmere shawl with a white center, an' a pale yeller drawn-silk bunnet, with white face flowers an' white strings. Judith said her clo'es come from Boston. Her gloves were white kid an'

Ase, he had white gloves, too, an' a brocaded satin vest, brown with a blue sprig. You know Irene never was much fer dress, but this woman's smarted him right up. He was introducin' of her to everybody, as proud 's Lucifer, an' when I come down the aisle, says he, 'Make you 'quainted with my wife, Mandy.' She hain't what you'd call han'some, she's ruther long favored, but she's very pretty appeared an' she stood there as smilin' 's a basket o' chips.

"Says I, 'You've got here jest in time to help us christen the new carpet.' We'd worked like beavers to git it down 'fore they come. Rhody was over an' carpeted their pew with a piece 't was left of the fore-room carpet that Irene braided hats an' bought before she was married. She'd al'ays kep' that strip, put up with camphire gum, in a bag that hung in the closet under the stairs in the front entry, an' there was jest enough for the pew. We laid out to carpet the aisles, all around the pulpit, an' up in the singin'-seats, and what do you think! Dan'el Gilman paid for the whole on 't up there, steps an' all, out o' his own pocket, he's so tickled 'cause they've put him in chorister. He's made for this world 'f he c'n run the singin'."

"He's called terrible nippin'," put in Mrs. Marston, "an' he has the name of deac'nin' his

apples. He uster go to our meet'n', but there was some trouble 'bout the singin' an' he went off over to t' other House."

"Most folks carpeted their pews with suthin they had in the house, though some that c'd 'ford it bought the new, 'cause Huldy Bartlett, she's the president of the Sewin' Society now, looked out a little large an' there was consid'-ble of a piece left. It's red and green, with sort of a di'mon'-shaped figger 'bout 's big over 's yer hand. We had a strip of stair carpetin' left over when we carpeted our front stairs, so I tacked that down in our pew. Aunt Priscilla Fogg 's got a han'some piece of rag carpet on hern. You know she weaves it for folks. Annette Walker hooked in a piece for their pew. She's a master hand for hooked-in rugs. Polly Cotton made their carpet out o' fine braids, shaded like a rainbow. It's a beauty. An' Judith embroidered covers for the crickets. They said they hadn't be'n int' the meetin'-house sence their mother was buried, nine year ago last December, but they wanted their pew fixed up. It 's used to seat strangers in, an' time of funerals it's most gin'ally needed for the mourners. I hain't told ye 'bout the present we had of a great sofy an' two chairs for the pulpit," said Mandy, stopping to thread her needle.

“Of all things! Who ’n the world gin them?”  
was the response.

“Can’t you remember Angeline Page an’ her mother, that uster live in the old Eph’ram Jewitt house? Angeline was a great scholar, an’ went down in the state o’ Maine to keep school. She married a widower down there by the name o’ Stiekney, an’ made out uncommon well, though he was old ’nough to be her father an’ had the lung diffikilty for a number o’ years. Mis’ Page died there an’ was fetched up to this yard, ’eordin’ to her request, an’ laid ’long side of her husband. Now Mr. Stiekney ’s be’n taken away, but he’d made his will so ’t the heft o’ the prop’ty went to Angeline, an’ she’s wealthy. Huldy Bartlett heard ’bout it—I tell you that woman hain’t left no stone unturned—so she writ down an’ told Angeline that the meetin’-house, where she uster go, was bein’ fixed up, an’ asked her if she wouldn’t like to help us out a little, thinkin’ we’d git a couple dollars, mebbe. You e’n imagine how struck up everybody was when that han’some pulpit set come, straight from a down East furniture shop. Angeline gin it in mem’ry of her mother,—the old lady belonged most fifty-nine year.

I jes’ wisht you e’d come up some Sunday an’ see ’f you don’t think our house looks complete,

but 't wouldn't never do for you to leave your own meetin'. 'Twould be sure to make talk if folks sh'd see you runnin' off up to the Orthodox. They'd think you'd taken a miff at suthin. Let me see! I declare! if it ain't our turn to have the meetin' Fast day. Then 'll be your chance."

"When be your folks calc'latin' ter have that levee come off?" asked Mrs. Marston.

"Next Wednesday night. They've got the bills all out," replied Mandy, tying a knot and waxing the thread to commence her last shoe. "Huldy, she's worked early 'n' late. It does beat all what some folks 'll do 'f they c'n be cap'n. Fer my part, I'd ruther train as a privit. They've got a sight o' pin-cushions, tidies an' lamp-mats for the fancy table. Then they're goin' ter have a grab-bag. Huldy's sot on havin' the album quilt sold by tickets, but the new minister don't jest approve. He says it's too much like the ways o' the world. Huldy 's bound to put it through, though, an' I'm 'fraid they'll git all by the ears 'fore it's over."

"You like this new man an' his fam'ly mid-dlin' well, I s'pose," said Mrs. Marston.

"Yes," was the reply. "Them that's good judges thinks he preaches excellent discourses, but he hain't so 'greeable a way with him 's



some. Them that takes like hot cakes at fust, though, hain't al'ays the ones 't wears best in the long run. His wife 's more of a sociable turn, but she enjoys dretful pore health. The daughter 's very 'complished. She makes hair wreaths, wax work, worsted flowers and all sich. Judith said she didn't know but you'd think she was smart 'nough for Nathan, if she was only a Baptist."

"I guess he hain't sufferin' fer no sich folde-rols, an' when I hain't able to take keer on him, he's capable o' doin' his own s'lectin'," quickly retorted the irritated mother.

"Now reely, Mis' Marstin, wouldn't you like ter have Nathan git him a good wife?" persisted Mandy. "Of course, there hain't nobody 'round here, though, that you'd want."

"Gals ain't good fer nothin' now days. All they wants is to dress up an' gad. I wish to goodness Nathan 'd come. Where d' you s'pose he is? Here 't is most dark."

"So 't is an' I must clip it home, for I've got to bile pertaters an' fry meat for supper. Sim works out 'n the wind so, it makes him awful hearty. He will eat half a mince pie tonight, then want a dish of apples 'fore bed time. It's all of a glare of ice out here by your fore-door. I guess it dreeps down where the snow melts off

the roof. I come within one o' goin' my whole length."

"Now don't stay away so long ag'in," said Mrs. Marston wearily as her visitor departed, and soon she fell asleep.

A little later Nathan came in, and finding his mother sleeping soundly did not disturb her, but quietly replenished the fire and set the tea kettle boiling, for his many years of experience in helping about the house had made him as handy as a girl. Then he drew off his boots to warm his feet on the stove hearth, disclosing a large hole in the toe of his left stocking.

"Oh, dear," he thought, quickly drawing back his burned foot, "how I do need a wife! I hate to say anything to mother about it, though, it always makes her feel so bad, and sometimes sets her into the palpitation."

Then he called to mind the long talks they had had on the subject, how every available girl in that vicinity had been discussed, but the mother had some serious objection to each one. There was one girl, however, of whom Mrs. Marston had not heard. One evening, the winter before, Nathan had covered himself with glory in winning the debate at the lyceum. A new, yet strangely familiar face in the audience had inspired him to do his best. At the conclusion of

the exercises, a nice-looking young lady stepped out from a settee near the front, saying she wished to congratulate him, and also to thank him for his kindness to a forlorn little girl at a Sunday-school picnic many years ago. He looked at the wavy hair and into the blue eyes and said, "It must have been little Cora Hastings." Then they recalled the circumstances, how Nathan had gone alone that day, and Mrs. Sylvester Hastings, who was busy setting the tables, had asked him to look after a little niece of hers. Her brother, she said, had left the child with her for a day or two while he attended to some business in the next town, and that the little girl had lost her mother only the week before and was very lonely. Cora remembered how Nathan had framed houses for her out of slender twigs and swung her in the swing, and told her that he was fourteen, just twice as old as she; then wisely explained that it would not always be so, that the next year and all the years after he would be only seven years older than she. That good, kind boy Cora never forgot, and Nathan had always cherished in memory the little girl with the long yellow curls. Once he had mustered up courage to ask Mrs. Hastings what had become of her niece and had learned that she had a step-mother, who didn't know how

to get along with children very well, so she had gone to live with her grandmother. After all these years she was at her aunt's again for a short visit. Nathan had called on her there, and they had corresponded during the past year. Now the grandmother, having recently died, the aunt had invited her niece to come to her home for a while, and it was in Aunt Mary Hastings' parlor with Cora that Nathan had spent the most of his afternoon at the village. A glorious afternoon it had been, for Cora had promised *some-time* to be his wife. How to break the news to his mother puzzled him sorely, but Cora had said, "It has all seemed so providential so far, we will trust Providence for the future."

The Marston house, which was situated about a mile and a half from the village, was a large, old-fashioned, two-story farm house, painted red. Mrs. Marston, a frail looking little woman, now in her seventy-second year, had long been a widow, living in the old home with her only child, Nathan, now a bachelor of thirty-five, a little gray and somewhat bald.

The son felt that he must bring home a wife soon, but how was he ever to reconcile his mother to a change in the household. Cora was a Baptist and that would go a long way with her. In the dim twilight he sat warming his feet and

thinking the matter over until his mother awoke. Then Nathan lit the lamp and displayed all the little packages that he had brought from the store, saying, "Here's your *Watchman and Reflector*, too, that came today,—but how hoarse you are! Has anybody been here?"

"Yes, Mandy Downs run over, but I let her do most o' the talkin'."

"Well, you generally have to do that. When she's wound up she'll go like an eight-day clock," said Nathan. "She told you all the news, I s'pose."

"Lor', yes, she was chock full on 't. Ye might jes' reach me the camphire bottle on the top shelf of the cupboard there, 'f ye will."

And Nathan, as he complied with his mother's request, said to himself, "There's one choice bit of news that even Mandy hain't got hold of yet."

Mrs. Marston complained of feeling chilly and aching all over, so she said, "I guess I'll take suthin hot an' put a mustard plaster on the back of my neck, then I'll go off ter bed. I'll have some hot rocks ter my feet, an' an extry tuck on top o' my coverlid so 's ter sweat me, an' mebbe I c'n sleep it off an' feel middlin' smart in the mornin'."

So Nathan made hot ginger tea, spread the

mustard paste and heated the soapstones, for he was used to this program. Afterwards he got his own supper, did the chores and read the paper, then, as his mother seemed sleeping quietly, he went to bed.

The next morning, however, Mrs. Marston was much worse. "Oh, dear me!" she moaned. "I never see the beat on 't, but seems 's if I couldn't lift my head from my piller, if 't was ter save me. I do' know but I 'm in fer a run o' lung fever. I guess, Nathan, yer 'd best run right over ter Downses 'fore Sim gits off ter the village, an' have him leave word fer the doctor ter come up. I hate ter give up an' have a doctor, seems 's if folks is sure ter be sick 'f they do, but the *old* doctor al'ays had the name o' not goin' more 'n he was needed, even where the pay was good."

When Doctor John came he pronounced Mrs. Marston a very sick woman, and said that a good nurse must be found for her immediately; he hardly knew where to look for one, they were all so busy just now, but Nathan instantly thought of Cora.

Mandy Downes had come over and would stay until they could get some one, so leaving her to sit by his mother, Nathan hurried away to the village, and did not have much difficulty in per-

suading Cora to return with him. Her grandmother had been an invalid for several years, so she had had some experience in sickness. As they approached the old red house Cora remarked, "Well, Providence has brought me to your home sooner than we expected."

"I 've got you a good nurse, mother," said Nathan, as the two entered her room, and she was too sick to ask any questions.

Such excellent care did Cora take of her patient that she was carried safely through a severe illness, and her recovery, so Doctor John told her, was due to good nursing.

One day, after Mrs. Marston was strong enough to sit up for a half hour in her chintz covered rocker, rolled up in a patchwork comfortable, she said to Nathan, when the nurse had left the room, "Now 'f ye c'd git sich a gal 's Cora fer a wife I sh'd be satisfied, but o' course ye hain't never tho't on 't. I s'pose she makes good pay a-nussin', an' like 'nough she don't want ter git married, but most on 'em does, if they gits a chance."

"You really think she 'd make a good wife, an' wish I 'd say something to her about it, then?"

"Yes," replied the old lady, "or mebbe I c'd hint 'round an' find out if she 's got a feller. I

hain't no match-maker, though, an' never was, fer I don't hold to it."

The next afternoon, when Mrs. Marston had taken a good nap, and Cora had Nathan's stockings all neatly darned and was looking for something else to do, Mrs. Marston said, "Right there in my under drawer ye 'll find a sheet that I laid by ter turn that very week 't I come down sick. Ye may have that job 'f ye want it. It 's sort o' pretty work though, when ye don't feel hurried." Then to herself she added, as Cora began the long over and over seam, "Now I must try an' see how the land lays."

An hour later, when Nathan came in to stay while the nurse went out for a walk, he was told the result of the investigation. "I as't her how she 'd injoyed herself here, an' 'f she did n't kind o' hate ter go off," began the mother, "an' I don't b'lieve she's a-hankerin' much fer ter go home. I cal'late there hain't no love lost 'twixt she 'n' her step-mother. Folks calls her an awful pious, good woman, but Cory got sot ag'n' her when she was a child, 'cause she cut off her long curls that her own mother was so proud on, for fear they was makin' of her vain an' worldly-minded. Her pa thinks the sun rises an' sets in his wife, an' that puts me in mind o' what Aunt Betsey Scruton uster say,



‘A mother ’s a mother all the days of her life, an’ a father ’s a father till he gits a second wife.’ He hain’t done for her none, late years, an’ there wa’n’t no call ’t he should, fer the ole lady was fore-handed, an’ now Cory gits it all. She owned up that there was a feller ’t she thought a sight on, but there was reasons why they could n’t git married jest yit. I should n’t want ter resk it ter have ye come in between ’em, fer sich things ain’t right, an’ ye would n’t never prosper.”

“That won’t be necessary, mother,” calmly remarked Nathan, “for I ’m the man she loves, an’ she promised to be my wife two months ago.”

“Why, for pity’s sake! What do ye mean? An’ ye never told me on ’t!”

“No, I was wonderin’ how I was ever goin’ to break the news to you, when you were taken sick, but I was sure you ’d like Cora if you only knew her.”

“Yes, she ’s all right, bless her heart! But I dew declar’ I never was so taken a-back in all my life.”

When Mrs. Marston fully realized the fact that Cora Hastings was to be the daughter concerning whom she had had so many years of anxiety, she could hardly wait for the wedding

day, so Elder Hunkins came over, and there was a quiet wedding in the old lady's room, just as soon as she was able to be dressed in her black silk gown and best cap. The stuffed haircloth rocking chair had been shoved in from the parlor for the occasion, and in it she sat in state, with a pillow behind her head.

Nathan and his wife, one afternoon, a few weeks later, overheard their mother talking to Mandy Downes, who was a little hard of hearing: "Yes," said Mrs. Marston, "'t was well wuth that hull fit o' sickness, the doctor's bill an' all, ter have the pickin' out o' Nathan's wife, an' ter have one, that I couldn't 'a' bettered if I 'd had her made ter order, step right in, so 's 't I could git acquainted with her beforehand."

## MISS HARDEN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY.

“Wall, if it don’t beat all!” muttered Rachel Dudley, as she basted the turkey. “Me a-gittin’ up a Christmas dinner fer newsboys, bootblacks an’ sich to eat right here in our dinin’-room! I ’ve be’n cook in this fam’ly goin’ on twenty year, an’ I never see the likes o’ this. I wonder what Miss Janet’s mother would say, if she was alive. She was dretful tony, the ole lady was, an’ so ’s Katherine, but land! Miss Janet, she ’s all Harden, no more like her mother than black ’s like white. I s’pose all this comes ’long o’ her gittin’ so int’restid in them mission folks.”

For all her grumbling Rachel was devoted to her mistress, and was determined that this Christmas dinner should equal any that she had prepared before. The dining-room was decorated with festoons of green and holly wreaths hung in the windows. The table sparkled with silver and cut-glass; a large hothouse bouquet stood in the center and there were carnation pinks at every plate. Rachel had just set on the platter, containing the huge turkey, beautifully browned, when heavy footsteps sounded

on the stairs. The door was thrown open, and the rich aroma of the turkey, mingled with the scent of the celery and the flowers, greeted the guests, who gazed at the table in open-mouthed wonder.

"Oh, posies!" whispered the little lame girl to her grandmother.

"Han'k'ch'efs 't every place!" said tiny Tim Tucker to Billy Sykes.

"Them 's bibs, you greeny, I 've seed 'em a-wearin' 'em in 't the big rest'runts," returned Billy, who had been a newsboy for more than a year, and knew the ways of the world.

Poor Jimmie Bird, the deaf and dumb boy, so far forgot himself that he stood on his head just for a minute, and was covered with confusion when Tom Mills, the bootblack, hastily reversed him.

Then came the Dawson girls, stiff and awkward; their mother had kept their hair in curl papers for two days, and had decked them out in some bits of finery, treasured relics of her maidenhood. As they sat down at the table Sarah, the younger one, jarred her dish of cranberry sauce so that a little of the juice spilled over on the tablecloth. This frightened her so that she began to cry, and appealed to her sister, saying, "Lem me hev the han'k'ch'ef now, Ellen; marm

said I sh'd kerry it half the time, an' you've had it ever sence we started."

The little lame girl sat on one side of Miss Harden, and her grandmother on the other. "Do you like turkey, Gracie?" asked Miss Harden, as she generously helped the child.

"Never had none 's I knows on," smilingly answered Gracie, but Grandma Harris thought of the days of the long ago, when she was the hired girl in a large farm-house, where she had often dressed the Thanksgiving turkey.

When the celery was passed "Tiny Tim" stuck his piece in his button-hole with his pinks, but felt he had done something wrong on account of the peculiar grin on the face of Billy Sykes, who slyly whispered, "They eats that bokay, Tim!"

Grandma Harris was as pleased as a child when in her own plate she saw the lucky bone, and she told the children how they used to wish over it and break it, when she lived at the farm.

Turkey and vegetables, pudding and pies vanished like dew before the sun. Never had the little folks from the mission eaten such a dinner, and then their plates were heaped with fruit.

All was still when something dropped with a sharp sound, causing the children to giggle, for

they knew that Jimmie Bird had lost off a button.

“Seems to me them grapes looks poorty green,” thought Grandma Harris; “they was al’ays sort o’ purple when they was fit to eat out to the farm.” But when once she had tasted the delicious white grapes her fear that they were not ripe quickly vanished. Just then Miss Harden noticed Tim Tucker struggling with his jacket pocket into which he was trying to squeeze an orange which was much too large for it.

“I hain ’t a-swiping nothin’,” explained Tim, “I jes’ thought I ’d kerry my orange home to Aunt Clarry, ’cause her ’s awful good to me. Her let me lay in Johnny’s bed all day yister-day, while her washed my clo’es so ’s ’t I could come to yer party. Johnny ’s Aunt Clarry’s little boy, on’y he ’s dead. I guess ’t ’ll go in when it ’s squozed a little more,” said he, applying his lips to the orange again.

Miss Harden urged her guests to eat all they could, and promised that each one should have a box of goodies to take home, so Tim finished his orange. Then they all went back to the parlor and Miss Harden played on the piano, and the children sang the songs they had learned at the mission; after the singing they joined in a

peanut-hunt, and Gracie Harris found the most, so she received the prize—a pretty book of Christmas stories. While they were gathered around Gracie looking at the pictures, suddenly the great folding-doors opened and revealed a splendor that dazzled the eyes of all.

A jolly, fat old man, with a very red face and a long white beard came forward, and Miss Harden introduced him as her friend, Santa Claus, who had brought one of his Christmas trees, the fruit of which always ripened on the twenty-fifth of December.

The tree was bright with lighted tapers and sparkling with tinsel. Among the branches peeped out books and pictures, dolls, drums, tops and jumping-jacks, while, dropped like wind-falls, on the chairs beneath were jackets and caps, shoes and hoods. Besides candy, toys and books, each one received just the things he or she most needed. Grandma Harris had some nice, warm flannels. She had patched her old ones, she said, “till there wa’n’t much left ter patch to.” The Dawson girls, who had expected to wear their old straw sailor hats all winter, were made happy by the possession of jaunty tam o’ shanters, but what delighted them most was a beautiful handkerchief apiece—“A han’-k’ch’ef with an open-work border an’ scollups

all round the aidge! Han'somer 'n marm's ever was!" exclaimed Ellen.

Jimmie Bird was presented with a new jacket, which he sadly needed, for the one that he wore was very old and had dropped its last button at the dinner table.

"A business outfit for Tom Mills, and may he ever shine like the noonday sun," said Santa Claus, as he handed a big box to Tom, who immediately began to investigate the contents, trying the brushes and counting the boxes of blacking. "It's jest a daisy of a kit!" said he. "My old one was second-hand, anyhow, an' it 's 'bout gone up, an' I did n't know how I was ever a-goin' ter scare up another."

How Billy Sykes' eyes shone when he was given a pair of stout shoes! By dint of extra hustling and crying his "*Herald, Globe, or Record!*" until he was as hoarse as a frog, Billy had managed to earn enough so that he felt justified in squandering a few pennies on a cake of soap, which he had promised that morning to "divvy" with Tom Mills for a shine. Tom had accepted the proposition, making "no extra charge," he said, for blacking Billy's toes, so that they would not show so plainly sticking up through the holes in his old shoes.

"Tiny Tim," who had come with a little rag-



ged scarf tied over his head, was given a warm cap and a pair of mittens.

Although Gracie and her grandmother had had the honor of riding to the party in Miss Harden's fine carriage, the little girl had been obliged to make her appearance wrapped in an old faded shawl, cherished in memory of her dead mother. When Santa Claus held out to the child a little red cloak and hood she fairly danced for joy, and clapped her hands until she dropped one of her crutches, which was picked up and presented in a most gallant manner by Billy Sykes.

Then Santa Claus, making a very low bow, said, "I guess the fruit o' this 'ere tree 's all picked an' I must be a-hurryin' along now, fer I 've got a good many more calls ter make."

Soon Hiram, the coachman, appeared at the door with the carriage, and Billy Sykes said to himself, "Jimminy! if that feller's voice don't sound 'xactly like the Santa Claus man's!" But none of the others—not even Grandma Harris—suspected that dignified personage of having masqueraded as Santa Claus.

It was decided to put the larger packages into the carriage with the Harrises, and as the rest started off with their arms full of presents, Billy Sykes shouted, "Three cheers for Miss Har-

den!" and Tom Mills, the Dawson girls, and "Tiny Tim" joined him in a rousing response. Then Jimmie Bird, seeing what the others were doing, hastened to show his appreciation in the best manner of which he was capable; so, dropping his bundles, he turned three somersaults and stood on his head.

"I never expected ter live ter see sich a day as this!" said grandma, as she slowly got into the carriage.

"And have you had a good time, too, Gracie?" asked the hostess.

A sweet smile lighted the little pale face, though tears were shining in the deep blue eyes. "Oh, Miss Harden!" she said, "I did n't s'pose I c'd ever go to heaven till after I 'd died first!"

When Janet Harden went to her room she picked up and re-read her invitation to the grand reception which her sister was holding in her New York home that evening. "If I had gone," mused the practical Miss Janet, "my dress would have cost more than I have spent for all those poor children, and I know I should n't have enjoyed Katherine's reception half so much as my own," and she smiled as she thought how shocked her fashionable sister would have been could she have looked in upon them that day.

Then, going to the pretty banner of Scripture

quotations and gems of poetry hanging on the wall, she turned over the leaf which she had been too busy to look at before.

“December twenty-fifth,” she began, “‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these,’—why!” she exclaimed, “I had n’t thought of *that!*”







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